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VOLUME 25
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AMAZING ANC STORIES

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PLANET OF NO RETURN

By LAWRENCE CHANDLER

AMAZING STORIES

MAY
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OBSERVATORY

..... by the Editor

THERE WERE six of us at the table: three writers, a couple of science-fiction editors, and an almost young woman nobody knew. (Seems she had the slightly fuzzy illusion that we were part of a leather goods convention in town that week, and since the waiter kept serving her along with the rest, what could she lose?)

THE CONVERSATION drifted along with casual aimlessness until somebody mentioned the atom bomb tests going on out near Las Vegas. That jerked the first writer erect in his chair as though his drink had suddenly turned radioactive.

"You just wait," he said darkly. "Won't be long now before we'll be digging A-bombs out of our ears—unless we do the smart thing first."

"What's the smart thing?" one of the editors asked.

"Get out of town, that's what!"

"Easy for you," the editor said. "But what about us guys with jobs?"

The writer made a noise in his throat. "Fat lot of good a job'll do you once they start dropping that bomb! Two of 'em would blow New York clear to Havana!"

The almost young woman said, "Yeah, you don't want to fool with that atom bomb. It's dynamite!"

THE SECOND writer signaled the waiter to do something about the empty glasses and said, "Don't you believe it. They'll never get over here with them things. Lot of talk, that's all."

"Clear to Havana!" the first writer said. "Bang, bang—and pick up the pieces! Only you'd have to wait a year to get near enough to pick 'em up, what with all the radioactive dust."

"Where," the editor said, "do you get all this information?"

"You kidding?" the writer demanded. "Look what happened at Hiroshima and—and that other town, whatever they called it. Thousands of corpses and every building in miles flattened ten feet into the ground!"

The waiter was back. The almost young woman said, "You can mix mine."

THE EDITOR said, "You're wrong, brother. About a lot of things. First place, even three A-bombs dropped on, say,

Chicago wouldn't seriously injure more than five percent of the population. Why? Because it and the other big cities have, or soon will have, concrete and steel shelters in the basements of big buildings in industrial centers. Private homes and apartment buildings have basements too—and any enemy bomber will be spotted in plenty of time for citizens to reach the comparative safety of such places."

THE THIRD writer said, "That sounds good—but just how good is it? These are atomic bombs, pal!"

"Look," the editor said. "Heat and blast are what do the big damage. Most of the buildings in a half-mile circle would be destroyed. But if you've got a foot or two of concrete, or even five feet of earth, between you and the heat and blast, you're fairly safe anywhere outside that circle. The important thing is to be *behind* something at the time. Why, at Hiroshima there were a couple of men on the ground floor of a reinforced concrete building *two blocks* from where the bomb went off—and both of them lived through it *and* the radioactivity."

"And speaking of radioactivity. The first release of it lasts no more than a *minute* or *two*; it gets sucked skyward by the column of smoke. After that you can pretty well forget about it. Even the radioactivity from an atomic explosion on the ground or underwater settles down within an hour or so. Proof? Not one person in Hiroshima or Nagasaki died from what they call 'lingering' radioactivity! Those are the facts."

BY THIS time the first writer's scowl was puzzled. "Are you trying to tell me this A-bomb doesn't amount to much after all?"

"Nothing like that," the editor said. "Anything that can get as hot as the surface of the sun and kick up a 400-mile-an-hour wind isn't what you'd take home to the kids. But I *am* saying that all this talk about lighting out for the hills because it does you no credit, nor anyone else who talks that way. This is America, my friend—and we never got where we are by running from reality. And I don't like soap-box patriots any better than you do!"

The almost young woman said, "You can mix mine, waiter." —HB

AMAZING STORIES

MAY, 1951

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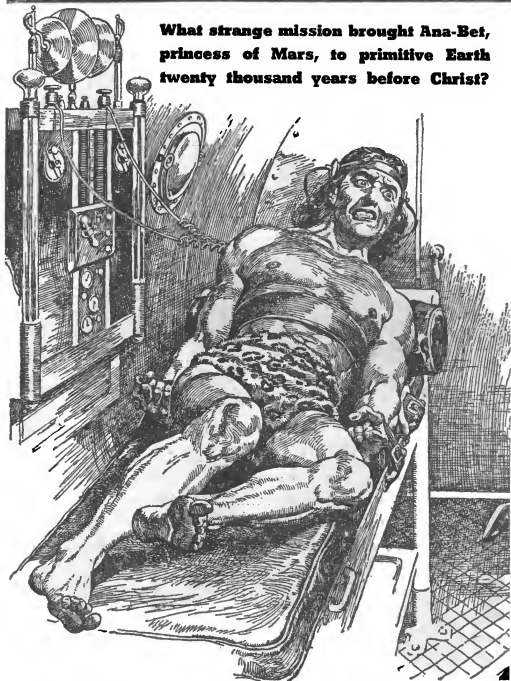
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PLANET OF NO

What strange mission brought Ana-Bet, princess of Mars, to primitive Earth twenty thousand years before Christ?

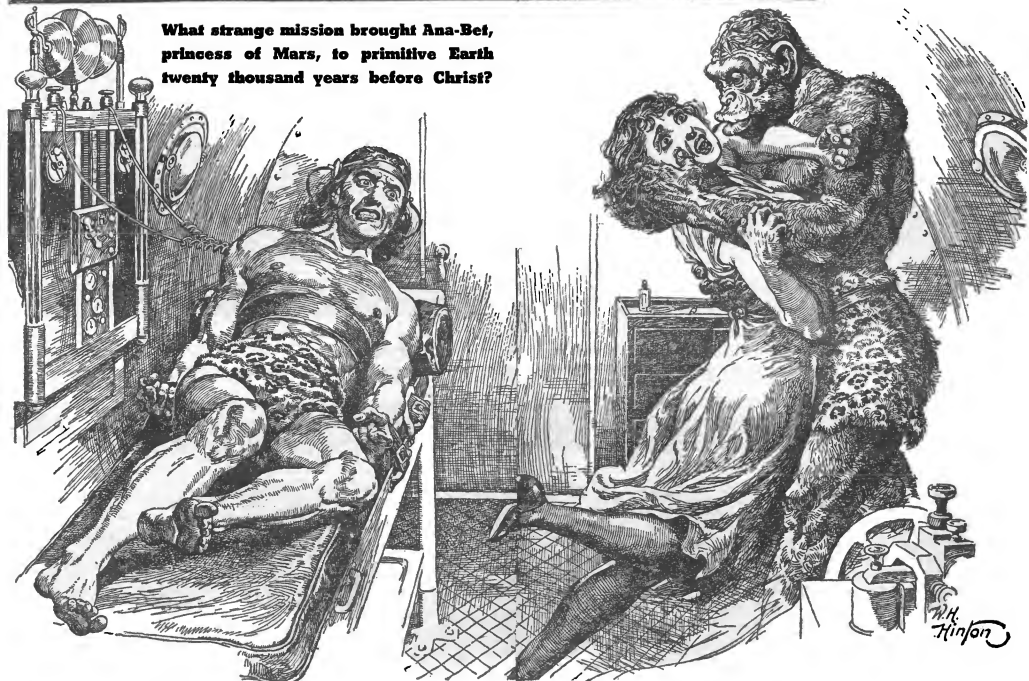


Even as Valer watched in helpless agony, the beast-man crushed the lovely Ana-Bet to him

PLANET OF NO RETURN

By
Lawrence Chandler

What strange mission brought Ana-Bet, princess of Mars, to primitive Earth twenty thousand years before Christ?



Even as Valar watched in helpless agony, the beast-man crushed the lovely Ana-Bet to him

RETURN

By
Lawrence Chandler



CHAPTER I

THEY came down out of a hot blue sky late one afternoon some twenty thousand years before the birth of Christ of Galilee. There were seven of them: long sleek metallic projectiles that gleamed like frosted silver in the golden sunlight.

The seven settled to earth in smooth silence, to form a long uneven line, one behind the other, among the lush grasses of a wide valley flanked by towering cliffs. For some time there was no other movement, no sign of life around those silvery hulls, while, within, technicians made tests of the unknown planet's atmosphere and studied the rolling semi-tropical terrain through powerful instruments.

In the flagship an audio-screen set in one wall of a luxuriously appointed cabin glowed with sudden light and a muted bell sounded a single note. Rhon-Dee, commander of the space fleet, leaned his lean and muscular body back in his chair and lifted cold blue eyes to the face of an under-officer framed in the square of frosted glass.

"Well?" the commander said quietly.

The face in the screen was impassive. "Atmosphere: oxygen twenty per cent, nitrogen seventy-nine per cent, remaining one per cent consists of argon, neon and traces of two unidentified gases—both harmless. Atmospheric pressure: slightly under fifteen pounds to the square inch."

The commander's nod was barely perceptible. "Signs of life?"

"Numerous small, winged creatures. Several groups of small arboreal animals not yet identified. A herd of herbivorous animals, four-footed, about the size of *zilots*. No indication of any higher forms of life."

Commander Rhon-Dee's expression gave no clue to his thoughts. He

looked slowly down at the charts and astral maps stacked neatly on the dull green metal of his desk top, and it was almost a full minute before he spoke again.

"Form a reconnoitering party—twenty men, heavily armed—and await further instructions. Have Captain Glat-Stevo come to my cabin immediately."

"At once, Commander."

The screen darkened and Rhon-Dee reached for the log-book and with a stylus entered several cramped notations on a fresh page. As he finished, a rhythmic knock sounded at the door and a tall broad-shouldered young man in uniform entered, saluted briskly and swept the cabin with a single glance.

"Close the door, Stevo," Rhon-Dee said mildly, using the diminutive of the other's name, as was customary among close friends.

Glat-Stevo banged the portal shut with a thrust of his foot, dropped into a chair across from the commander and swung the heels of his polished boots to rest on one corner of the desk.

FOR A LONG moment the two men sat there without speaking, each well aware of what the other was thinking. Both were case-hardened fighting men, veterans of numerous campaigns on their home planet. They had graduated, as classmates, with highest honors from their country's war college, and the air arm of Andara's armed forces was their immediate choice. In a world constantly torn by wars, the two close friends rose rapidly through the ranks to high commissions. It was Rhon-Dee's bent for organization, plus a touch of caution completely lacking in his friend, that had put him slightly higher up the scale than Glat-Stevo; but there was no envy or jealousy in

the latter's entire makeup and the difference in rank imparted no strain on their relationship.

"Well, we made it," Glat-Stevo said cheerfully and unnecessarily.

Rhon-Dee, idly turning the stylus between his powerful fingers, only grunted.

"Which means," Glat-Stevo continued, still cheerfully, "that Had-Sudol probably made it too."

"Not at all," Rhon-Dee said sharply. "Had-Sudol started on his insane journey more than three years ago. Instruments and fuel needed for interplanetary travel were hardly beyond the experimental stage in those days."

"So it would have required six months instead of three," his companion said. "And a landing here might have been somewhat more perilous. But this planet was his target and the chances are excellent that he hit it—and all your wishful thinking to the contrary is wasted."

"Then," the commander snapped, "why did he fail to return?"

"That is what the Princess Ana-Bet wants to know—and the reason seven space ships and five hundred of Andara's best warriors have traveled something like 43,000,000 miles. Love is a powerful emotion, my friend; I must try it sometime!"

"In this case," Rhon-Dee said, "it is outright madness. With what this expedition has cost our country an entire army could have been outfitted and placed in the field. Our borders are ringed with enemies who may strike at any moment; yet here we are, far from home, on a fool's errand. There was no reason why it could not have been postponed another year, when conditions might be less explosive."

Glat-Stevo's smile was wry. "Conditions are always explosive on our world. Which is why, even with the

equipment for space travel in our hands, we have never before made the attempt. Another year—another ten years!—and there would still be wars about to begin, or about to end so that they might begin again. So who shall blame the Princess for refusing to wait longer for a place in her lover's arms?"

Rhon-Dee's already unsmiling countenance darkened under a scowl. "You," he said accusingly, "seem to be enjoying this."

Glat-Stevo spread his hands. "Why shouldn't I? I'm not in love with Her Highness Ana-Bet, ruler of all Andara."

"Are you suggesting that I am?"

"Suggesting it?" Glat-Stevo gave a snort of amusement. "There's none in all Andara who doesn't *know* it! You wear your heart on your forehead, Dee—and in this case hopelessly so. The handsome Had-Sudol holds Ana-Bet's heart—and dead or alive he'll never let it go."

ANGER AND pain at his friend's words were evident in Rhon-Dee's eyes. He was on the point of making some heated retort, when the cabin door was thrust unceremoniously open and the Princess Ana-Bet, breath-taking in a revealing tunic of royal green, stood there, her deep brown eyes flashing with mingled anger and impatience.

Both men sprang to their feet and came stiffly to attention, the stylus dropping from Rhon-Dee's fingers to the desk top and making a brief whisper of sound in the sudden silence as it rolled a few inches across the metal surface.

When she spoke, Ana-Bet's voice was as cold as Rhon-Dee's eyes. "Why are you sitting here?" she demanded of the commander. Before he could reply, she swept into the room and up to the desk, ignoring completely



RHON-DEE

the stiff-faced Glat-Stevo. "Must I remind you," she continued imperiously, "that we are here for a reason, that every minute counts? Do you intend sending out warriors in search of Had-Sudol—or do you expect to lounge about with your feet up and your jaws flapping like those of palace slaves?"

Color burned in Rhon-Dee's lean cheeks; but his voice was quiet and contained. "Is it Her Highness' desire to take over command of this expedition?"

Ana-Bet's firm breasts pushed hard against her low-cut bodice under a sharply drawn breath. "You—you speak this way to *me*? I should order you whipped before the eyes of every person on these ships!"

Rhon-Dee bowed gravely. "I await Her Highness' pleasure."

The girl—she was no more than a year or two past twenty—bit her lip in indecision and her eyes wavered and fell before the man's steady gaze. When she spoke again, her anger was gone, replaced by an almost childish petulance.

"Why do you treat me this way, Dee? You know I need you if I'm to find Had-Sudol. Why must you be difficult?"

At her words there came into Rhon-

Dee's face an expression of such fawning adoration that Glat-Stevo, seeing it, felt his teeth grind in impotent rage. Damn a woman, he thought, who could thus melt down the metal of Andara's finest warrior! True, she was the planet's most beautiful woman; but beauty was evil when it could turn a man's blood to water.

Rhon-Dee said, "Twenty armed men are preparing to scout the fleet's immediate vicinity, Princess. We already have learned the air is breathable; and its pressure, while somewhat greater than that of Tervius, will give us no discomfort. When we're certain no danger exists, the hatches will be opened and the search for Had-Sudol can begin."

The girl's brown eyes widened. "Danger? From what?"

"That we do not know—yet. But it is almost certain some form of intelligent life exists here. Just how intelligent—and how dangerous—is what we must know before we go any further with our plans."

The soft full lips of the princess curled slightly. "Always the cautious one, aren't you, Dee? In almost two days of circling this world we've seen nothing but great empty seas and vast stretches of land filled with mountains and plains and forests. Not a single city—not even a crude hut suitable for the lowest slave. Give me two warriors armed only with *kodets* and I will take the entire planet!"

"Let's hope it will be that easily done," Rhon-Dee said lightly. "Not that we'll have to conquer it all, however. According to charts found among Had-Sudol's papers, he intended to bring down his ship somewhere in this vicinity. Since this valley seems the only likely landing spot within miles, the chances are good that we should pick up some trace of him within a few days at the most."

The girl was staring closely at him

as he spoke. "You don't want him found, do you, Dee?" she said with sudden directness. "Or better still, you'd like his bones found bleaching in the sun, so that I may *know* he is dead!"

Through stiffened lips Rhon-Dee muttered, "What words of mine have given Her Highness the right to so accuse me?"

"Words?" Ana-Bet snapped. "Do I need words from you? Your face, your eyes, your voice, even the set of your shoulders, tell me better than any words what you are thinking. Hear this, Rhon-Dee: I love only one man—and if it be true that he no longer lives, as you hope, then I would mate with the lowest slave before enduring the touch of your hand!"

With this, the Princess Ana-Bet whirled and stormed out of the room.

When the echoes of the slammed door were gone, Glat-Stevo's eyes dropped to his hands and he did not speak. He could picture the anguish the girl's hot words must have brought to his dearest friend, and he would not shame him by seeing it mirrored on his face....

In the silence there was a minute click as a tiny switch was thrown; then came Rhon-Dee's voice, calm and unhurried:

"Attention, all captains. Attention, all captains. Disembark your men and stand by for further orders."

CHAPTER II

VALAR, youthful warrior of the tribe of Pollex, awoke with a start. Dimly to his ears came a distant throbbing drone which, even as his brain registered the sound, faded and was gone.

A puzzled frown creased the clear deeply tanned skin of his forehead as he drew himself erect on the high-

flung branch of a jungle patriarch where he had been sleeping through the humid heat of mid-afternoon. He spent a moment or two peering through the tangle of vines, creepers and leaves partially hiding the game trail below. But nothing moved along the dusty ribbon there, and only the sound of myriad insects and the chattering of a band of long-tailed monkeys broke the silence.

Valar ran a hand thoughtfully through his shock of tousled black hair. To remain alive long in this savage world required full knowledge of everything in it; and he was well aware that nothing in his experience could explain the peculiar muted roar he had just heard. As he sought to recall the direction from which the sound had come, the belief grew that it had originated from above and toward the place where each morning Oru, the sun, rose from its sleep.

Although the air was hot, Valar felt a little shiver of cold sweep through him. Around the cave fires during the rainy season he had heard many stories of giant gods who roamed the skies and hurled great bolts of fire upon the cowering world below. Perhaps it was the voice of one of those gods which had roused him! Valar's powerful hand dropped to the



ANA-BET

stone knife thrust within the folds of his loin cloth. It might be wiser if he gave up his plan of hunting Tao, the deer, in the cool of evening and returned to the caves of his tribe.

But even as the thought came, Valar discarded it. A warrior who ran from a mere sound, no matter how strange, was fit only for painting pictures on cave walls! Besides, as a member of the tribe, it was his duty to investigate anything that might prove to be a source of danger to his people.

Having thus rationalized his natural curiosity into something much more high-minded, Valar adjusted the coils of his grass rope across one shoulder and under the opposite arm, swung his quiver of flint-tipped arrows into place, picked up the short black-wood bow and set off resolutely through the upper terraces of the forest, moving due east.

With all the effortless grace of little Tola, the monkey, the young caveman raced along the swaying boughs from one tree to the next—now threading his way along a slender branch before leaping lithely across twenty feet of open space to grasp unerringly a trailing vine with which to swing him into the embrace of still another forest giant. Time and again his only support was his mighty hands and arms whose biceps were like banded layers of steel. Yet in all this there was no suggestion of effort—no apparent strain or tension. The dense jungle foliage seemed magically to open and close ahead and behind his flying figure, so that seldom did he brush against the riot of vegetation.

With all this speed, however, Valar was moving with the stealth of Tarka, the panther, stalking its prey. At any moment he might come upon the source of the mysterious sound which had awakened him—and it was a jungle axiom that anything strange was sure to be dangerous as well.

WHEN nearly two hours had passed without disclosing anything more deadly than the usual forest denizens, Valar began to wonder if what he had heard was no more than a figment of his imagination. Darkness was not far away, and so rapid had been his progress through the trees that he was a long way from the caves of his people. The jungle at night held no terrors for him, for he was as much at home within its inky depths as he would be surrounded by his own people. It was simply that a useless journey through a relatively unknown territory held no attraction for him.

Unconsciously he slowed his pace; and when another half hour went by without incident he was on the point of turning back when he caught a glimpse of a break among the trees. Slowly he swung ahead, and a few moments later was poised high in a tree overlooking a narrow strip of grassland bordering the edge of a wide valley. A long-gone glacier had left a sprinkling of loose shale, rocks and boulders at the lip of the cliffs, and a family of monkeys was perched there, chattering among themselves with great excitement while peering down at the valley floor.

What the creatures saw was effectively hidden from Valar. He slid lightly to the ground, probed the grassy belt between him and the cliff top with eyes, ears and nose as highly developed as those of any jungle dweller. Very faintly he caught what might have been the murmur of many voices and irregular clanking sounds that were like nothing he had ever heard before.

The inherent caution that is so much a part of all creatures of the wild held Valar hidden within the jungle's edge for a while longer as he sought to solve by ear alone the meaning of those strange noises. But

the insistent tug of curiosity finally overcame all reluctance, and knife in hand he wriggled his way through the tall grass toward the cliff's edge.

So soundless was the caveman's progress that he nearly reached his goal before the band of monkeys caught sight of him. Voicing shrill cries of anger and alarm they scampered past him in a wide circle and disappeared into the jungle. Valar froze face down where he lay, fearing that unfriendly eyes had witnessed Tola's precipitate flight and would come to investigate. But the odd sounds, louder now, went on as before; and presently he began to inch his way ahead once more.

By the time he reached the line of boulders the fading light of day ended with the abruptness common to the tropics. Valar was congratulating himself that he was now safe from prying eyes, when a vast pool of artificial light suddenly flooded the valley floor and the probing fingers of huge beacons lit up the entire sky above it.

Only an iron will and a mind that knew not the meaning of fear kept Valar from bounding to his feet and fleeing for the safety of the trees. But once the initial shock had passed and no fresh danger revealed itself, the cave youth slipped between two mammoth boulders and carefully poked his head over the edge of the sheer cliff.

The sight that met his eyes was one the young warrior was never to forget. In the glare of radiance from several portable banks of lights was a line of enormous cylinders, drawn to tapering points in front and ending bluntly in a maze of power tubes and tail fins. They lay with their bellies in the grass, nose to tail, each several hundred feet long and fully fifty feet in height. Around them, bathed in brilliant man-made light, eddied and flowed a river of strange beings clad in unknown skins of many colors that

reached from neck to knee. While they were formed exactly as the people of his own tribe, Valar discovered, they were more on the frail side, their skin was far lighter in color and, with few exceptions, their hair was much shorter. The faces were as free of hair as Valar's own, but the distance was too great for him to make out the features.

THE young cave lord was enthralled.

Surely here were the gods of legend and story. How he longed to descend boldly and greet them, to hear from their lips such wisdom as to make him the envy of his tribe. With the wish, however, came the pangs of doubt. Not all gods, according to tribal elders, were good. In fact, from the stories he had heard, most of them were a senselessly cruel and vicious lot who brought droughts and floods and sickness and death, and who often assumed the likeness of the great cats or deadly snakes to kill you unless you carried within your loincloth a protective amulet. Valar himself carried a small stone marked with yellow ochre for that purpose, which he had purchased from his tribe's most venerated patriarch at the cost of two plump deer.

Valar scratched his head in puzzlement. How does one tell a friendly god from an evil one? It was a ticklish point—one that would plague mankind for thousands of years to come. Perhaps if he returned to the caves of Polex and enlisted the aid of older heads—He put the thought from him. This was his discovery. To share it with others would be to run the risk of having all glory and honor taken over by somebody else.

The hours wore on, and still Valar crouched there drinking in the scene below him. He watched the strangers as they strolled aimlessly about the towering cylinders or entered and left the lighted interiors. Some of them

manned the banks of lights, while others operated the powerful beacons, shifting the blinding beams in apparently aimless patterns along the valley walls and the sky overhead. Several times Valar jerked his head back barely in time to prevent the moving rays from picking him out to the eyes below.

Later, he witnessed the return of several hunting parties bearing a number of carcasses of Tao, the deer. Fires were kindled near each cylinder and soon the mouth-watering scent of grilled meat rose to Valar's nostrils reminding him that he had not eaten since mid-morning. But even the claws of a healthy appetite could not drag the cave youth from his vantage point. From the forest depths behind him rose the nightly chorus: the coughing grunt of Kraga, the lion, and Conta, his mate; the shrill scream of Shanda, the leopard, as he made his kill; the purring growl of Tarka, the panther, as he fed upon the body of some succulent grass-eater. So accustomed to these sounds was Valar that he heard them only subconsciously, but there was none of them that instinct and experience did not weigh as a possible threat.

Once a stirring in the grasses, so faint that an ordinary ear could never have caught it, brought him around and ready, knife clenched in a muscular fist. But the sound was not repeated and he turned back to his rapt study of the valley below.

At last the activity there lessened as the strange beings began to straggle into the monstrous cylinders. Cooking fires were smothered and one by one the searchlights winked out and the banks of portable floodlights dimmed and went black. Sentries, two to each space liner, took up positions near the main hatchways; and Valar noticed that each man held a short glistening tube curved at one end to fit the hand.

Some kind of weapon, he decided, and wondered at the form of death it would deal out.

All during his lonely vigil a plan had been forming in the caveman's mind. At first he was hardly aware of it, but as the strangers sought their beds and the lights went out, leaving the camp in partial darkness, it began to take on concrete lines. It was a plan that was worse than foolhardy—and therein lay its chief charm!

Why not slip into the very midst of the encampment and observe its wonders at close hand?

The longer he thought about it, the less reckless such an attempt seemed. By carefully circling the area he could come up to those huge man-made cliffs from the side opposite to where the sentries were posted. He would be reasonably safe from discovery, for Mua, the moon, had not yet risen to roam the night sky; that plus his own ability to move as soundlessly as a shadow should be protection aplenty.

Backing away from the rocky rim, Valar rose to his feet and flitted lightly southward until he was well below the point where the last of the cylinders lay. Satisfied that no eye, however keen, could observe him, he slid lithely over the brink of the valley and swarmed down the sheer rock with an ease and surefootedness that would have been incredible even in the full light of day.

Once he reached the level floor of the valley, Valar's approach to the rear ship was as silent as it was swift. Within a few minutes after reaching solid ground he arrived at the unguarded side of the towering craft and was running an inquisitive hand along its silvery underside.

It was Valar's first contact with metal of any kind, and its chill smooth feel brought an involuntary murmur of awe to his lips. Slowly he moved along the giant craft's entire

length, lost in wonder at the miracle of its construction.

So engrossed was the cave youth that his first inkling of danger came when a strong light struck him full in the eyes, momentarily blinding him. With the quickness of thought he turned to flee—only to pitch headlong as muscular arms caught him around the legs!

CHAPTER III

HE AWAKENED late that morning. Already Oru was above the line of trees to the east, and from the clearing below the caves came the sounds of women at their never ending tasks and the shrill voices of children at play.

He dozed for a while longer, half-awake, until the pangs of hunger began to grow uncomfortably. Rising from his pallet of skins, he crossed the large and comparatively light and airy cave and stepped out onto a ledge of rock nearly a hundred feet above the clearing.

"Ho there!" he shouted.

Instantly all activity ceased on the ground below. The women looked up almost fearfully and the children fell silent. Even a group of warriors ceased their endless bragging.

"Where is my food?" cried the man on the ledge. "I am hungry!"

A woman who had been removing the hair from a deer skin dropped the stone scraper guiltily and ran into one of the caves. Only then did life below take up its normal course, but more subdued now as though still under the spell of the man standing high up the cliff side.

Satisfied that he would soon be fed, the man turned and entered his subterranean quarters. Near the rear wall a small spring bubbled along the stone floor before disappearing underground again. Removing the circle of

panther skin from about his hips, the man bathed himself in the cold water, shivering at its bite.

As he crouched there by the small stream and dried himself with handfuls of dead grasses, he caught a glimpse of his face reflected by the water. His long imprisonment had changed him but little, he decided. His gray eyes were still clear and steady; his face, a bit fuller through lack of activity, was undeniably handsome. Systematic exercises had kept his tall slender body supple and strong, and long hours of sunning himself on the outer ledge had tanned his skin almost to blackness.

If only he had something to do—someone to talk with! He marvelled again that sheer boredom had not driven him mad long before this. There was no hope of his ever returning to his own world, for the space ship that had brought him here lay wrecked beyond repair where it had crashed on that long-gone day when he had landed on this miserable planet!

The wild men who had found him crumpled beside his ship would have slain him where he lay had not older heads among them urged caution. It was clear, they pointed out, that he was a god. To kill him might well bring destruction to the entire tribe. But the younger and more hot-headed members argued that a god would never have permitted himself to fall into their hands in the first place—a point countered by the statement that this might be some sort of test by the gods to learn if the tribe of Ulgo was worthy of life.

Ulgo, himself, had solved the dilemma. They would put him in one of the high caves where escape was impossible for a mortal. If he vanished, then he was indeed a god; if he grew old and died, then he was human and who would care?

For the first year of his captivity

Had-Sudol, nobleman of Andara, was treated with the utmost respect. The aged crone who twice daily brought him food was so overcome with awe that she was barely able to perform her task. Had there been a way for him to descend to the ground or scale the remaining distance to the top of the cliffs he would long since have escaped. But the lack of foot—or hand-holds on the sheer rock sealed him up as effectively as the thickest stone walls could have done.

FROM THE first, Had-Sudol had spoken kindly to the old woman who brought his food, although he realized she could not understand his words. When he did so, she would shrink back fearfully, put down the bowls of food and dash for the outer ledge to be drawn up by a rope to the cliff's rim.

However, when the first year had passed and he had not transformed her into the likeness of Cretah, the hyena, or blasted her with sky fire, she began to relax sufficiently to answer his greeting. From this beginning they slowly progressed to where she was teaching him the language of the cavemen.

Only a moon or so ago she had brought him a bit of disquieting news. Her wrinkled face seemed even more troubled than usual as she had placed a portion of well-cooked deer flesh in his hands, and when, at his urging, she told him what was troubling her, her voice quavered with something more than age.

"There are those among the warriors who say you are no god," she had said. "They argue that were you such, you would long ago have gone back to the skies from whence you came. They say you should be put to death—that they are weary of hunting food to keep you fat while their own families often go hungry."

His smile had been grave. "You know I'm not a god, Koka. Many times I have told you so. Why do you not tell them?"

Her eyes, he realized, had glistened with what could have been mistaken for tears if he had not known her better. "I will tell them nothing! They do not want me because I am old and useless. There is little time left for me, and without you to care for I would have nothing to do but sit alone and wait to die." She had paused briefly, staring at him out of beady black eyes, then smiled, revealing toothless black gums. "Because you say you are no god does not keep you from being one. True, you have remained here three summers. But what is time to a god? Perhaps it is thus that you test the tribe of Ulgo!"

SO DEEP in thought was Had-Sudol that he failed completely to hear the slither of rope against the rock outside his cave. But the sound of a stealthy footstep behind him broke through his preoccupation and he straightened and whirled in one smooth swift motion.

Standing there was a girl—a girl lovely beyond belief!

The young nobleman's arms fell limply to his sides and his jaw sagged with open astonishment. And then he saw that the girl was staring with frank admiration at his naked body, and he caught up the skin of Tarka and fastened it about his middle, his fingers unsteady. The girl's face flamed then until it was no less red than his own.

"Who are you?" he demanded sharply.

She held out a stone bowl in which were bits of stewed flesh and fruit fresh from the trees. "I have brought you food," she said, her low, faintly husky voice unsteady.

Automatically Had-Sudol took the

bowl from her, his eyes never leaving her face. Her hair, falling in rich profusion to her flawless shoulders, was the warm gold of sunlight—a hue almost unheard of among the dark-skinned cave dwellers. Her eyes were direct, intelligent and so deeply blue as to seem almost black. High cheekbones with faint hollows beneath, a small shapely nose above bewitching lips, a firm rounded chin that hinted of a rebellious nature, skin more golden than tanned—these made up the perfection and vitality of her face. She was somewhat taller than average, long and slender in the legs, with the pelt of Shanda, the leopard, both concealing and emphasizing the softly rounded glory of hips and breasts.

Had-Sudol wet suddenly dry lips and his smile was an almost obvious effort. "Who are you?" he repeated.

There must have been something in his expression that he was unaware of; for suddenly the girl retreated a pace or two and glanced uneasily over her shoulder toward the cave entrance.

"Wait," the young man said quickly. "Don't go. You're—"

The rush of words stopped abruptly as Had-Sudol realized he had been about to say to this savage half-naked cave girl words he had never spoken to any woman.

They stood there unmoving, looking deep into each other's eyes, in a silence as electric as a tropical rainstorm. And then the man from Andara deliberately broke the spell.

Reaching into the stone bowl, he scooped up several bits of meat and began to eat. "Where," he said, "is Koka? Always before she was the one to bring me my food."

"She is dead," the girl said indifferently. "When my mother tried to wake her this morning, she was cold and stiff. And so they took her out and heaped stones over her."

Had-Sudol winced, not only be-



DULEEN

cause his only friend in the tribe was dead, but at the lack of feeling in the voice of this lovely creature. He said wonderingly: "Was Koka of your family?"

"She was the mother of my mother."

"Doesn't it matter to you that she is dead?"

The girl obviously did not understand what prompted the question. "She saw many summers. Does one live forever?"

Had-Sudol shrugged and gave it up. What could you expect from savages? He bit one of the round balls of fruit. "You haven't told me your name," he pointed out.

"I am Duleen, daughter of Ulgo who is chief of the tribe."

"Duleen..." He repeated the name lingeringly. "It is a lovely name—almost as lovely as you."

She reddened with a mixture of pleasure and confusion and made no reply.

"Why," Had-Sudol asked, "does the daughter of a chief bring food to a prisoner?"

"Who else would be permitted to serve a god?"

He gulped down the rest of the food and put down the bowl instead of

handing it to the girl. With a bit of dried grass he wiped his hands and lips, smiling faintly at Duleen's uncertain expression.

"Do you think I'm a god?" he asked.

"Yes," she said simply. "Only a god could come out of the sky."

His heart was beginning to pound uncontrollably. Almost of its own accord his hand reached out and caught her by the wrist. "You are beautiful, Duleen," he whispered hoarsely.

She stood stiff and unmoving, her warm lips slightly parted, her breasts rising and falling under ragged breathing.

And then Had-Sudol swept the lovely girl savagely into his arms and pressed his lips firmly against hers!

For a brief intoxicating moment she yielded to his passionate caress. But for only a moment. With a half-stifled gasp, she wrenched free of his embrace and lashed out with one clawing hand. Nails bit into his cheek bringing blood and he fell back, voicing a startled cry of pain. Before he could recover, the girl whirled out of his reach and was running for the outer ledge, her golden hair flying.

"Duleen!" he shouted. "Wait! I didn't mean—"

He was alone in the cave. By the time he reached the ledge the girl was swarming hand-over-hand up a single strand of grass rope anchored at the cliff top. His first impulse was to follow, to make her understand that he had acted so only out of a loneliness three years had made unbearable. But immediately he realized such a move would be useless, if not actually dangerous. The guards constantly on duty above the caves would be armed where he was not; they could kill or recapture him, depending on how they felt about the matter. Or, he thought ruefully, the girl

might do the job for them. In her anger she might loosen the rope while he still climbed—and plunge him a hundred feet to the ground below.

Duleen, daughter of Ulgo, disappeared with a breathtaking display of bare legs and shapely thighs, and a moment later the dangling rope too was gone. His mind a welter of conflicting emotions, Had-Sudol turned and walked slowly back into his cell.

CHAPTER IV

AS HE FELL to the ground under the impact of an unseen attacker, Valar twisted savagely aside, freeing his legs from the vise-like grip. Cat-like he came to his feet, only to feel hands close about one ankle and seek to bring him down again. Forgetting the knife at his belt, the cave youth brought a clenched fist down in a chopping motion that, had it landed squarely, would have snapped the other's spine like a dry twig. Instead, the blow landed glancingly on a shoulder, bringing a shrill cry of anguish; and before Valar could strike again, two more of Rhon-Dee's warriors were upon him.

The battle which followed was short and savage. Brought to his knees under the fresh attack, the man from the caves came erect with the full weight of two heavily built men across his back. Reaching over his shoulder, he fastened one hand in the folds of a tunic, tore one of the figures away and flung it aside with a single sweep of his arm. There was a dull crunching sound as bone met metal—and the odds had shrunk to two to one.

A single shake of his mighty shoulders freed Valar from the weight of the second enemy. Snatching the stone knife from his loin cloth, he brought the razor-keen blade around in a sweeping arc that caught the third

warrior full in the throat and nearly decapitated him. Blood spurted, staining the caveman red from chest to knees as he avoided the crumpling figure and turned to run.

He was too late! A living wall of fighting men, aroused by the sounds of conflict, rose in Valar's path and flung themselves upon him. Several felt the agony of knife wounds before the weapon was torn from his grasp, then the butt of a heat pistol crashed sickeningly against his skull—and the young caveman knew no more.

* * *

FOR THE rest of the morning Duleen went about her usual duties in a daze. It seemed that she could still feel the strong arms of the god around her, the flaming touch of his lips on her own, the heat of his body burning into her flesh like the rays of Oru.

It was not that she failed to understand what was happening to her. Eighteen summers among the caves and jungles of her untamed world had given Duleen more than an inkling of the intimate relationship between male and female. Most of the young men—and many an older one!—of her father's tribe had shown clearly that they desired her. But where, before, it had left her unmoved, the brief encounter with the handsome young captive had changed all that. Just thinking of him tore her between ecstasy and confusion. She never wanted to see him again—and the hours were dragging until she might again bring him his food.

No! She would not go near him. Let somebody else wait on him! How could she go back there after what he had done? He could starve as far as she was concerned!

Moments later she was staring up at the sky, wondering at the slowness of Oru's passage.



VALAR

By mid-afternoon Duleen was as tense and jumpy as one of the great cats prowling the jungle. She had gone to the spring for water for the cooking pots, when Bulat, a hunter of the tribe, came bursting into the clearing breathless with excitement.

"The gods have come!" he shouted. "I saw them! The gods are here!"

Instantly he was surrounded by an excited throng of warriors and women. The word "gods" had electrified them all. Hearing it, Duleen, her mind on the captive god, dropped the huge gourd filled with water and ran to join the others. Her father was already there, tall, hawk-nosed, commanding.

"Has Oru cooked your head, Bulat?" the chief snapped. "What is this talk of gods?"

"I tell you I saw them!" the hunter cried. "They came down like Keta, the eagle, in great hollow rocks as long as the highest tree. From the sky they came, lightly as a drifting leaf, until they reached the ground. At first these great shining rocks lay there resting, then holes appeared in their sides and many gods came out and walked among the grasses of the valley. For a time I watched them; then I hurried here to tell you."

THERE WAS a murmur of superstitious awe from some of his listeners and expressions of fear were plain on several faces among the women. But Ulgo indicated he was strongly skeptical.

"Where are those shining rocks?" he asked.

"A short march toward where Oru sleeps."

"And you say there were many of these gods?"

"Many times the number of a man's fingers and toes," Bulat declared. "And those, I think, were not all. Others must have remained within the long rocks."

"How large were these gods?" Some of the chief's doubt was fading under the promptness and certainty of the hunter's words.

"Much like the god we keep here," Bulat said. "And they wore strange skins like the one he wore when we found him."

At this, the nervousness of Bulat's audience increased markedly, and one of the tribe's old—and presumably wise—men raised his voice. "They have come to free their brother," he said quaveringly. "They will come here and kill us all unless we run into the jungle and hide until they are gone."

An undercurrent of agreement to the proposal swept the crowd, forcing the wily chief to act promptly or be caught up in a stampede he would be helpless to contain.

"Are we like Cretah, the hyena, to slink into the bushes, afraid of what we have not even seen? Let us go and look at these gods before we talk of running away!"

His words brought a sudden melting back of the men nearest him. Ulgo's face purpled with rage; but before he could find his voice again, the old man spoke up a second time.

"We must free the captive god," he

said solemnly, "that he may return to his brothers and tell them we did not harm him. Then will they return to the sky and leave us in peace."

As befitted a chief, Ulgo would have none of this craven suggestion. "No!" he shouted. "He would only lead them to our caves that they might slaughter us. Instead we will kill him and throw his body into their faces. Thus will they know that the warriors of Ulgo fear neither god nor man!"

Duleen, listening at the outer fringes of the group, felt cold fear close about her heart at her father's words. Tears stung her eyes and a protest rose to her lips. But she bit back the words because she knew nothing she could say would change things and because she was not actually sure that she wanted Had-Sudol to live. Or, she thought wildly, maybe she was sure and refused to admit it!

After a heated argument it was decided that Ulgo and ten of his warriors would go to the valley and get some idea of just how many gods were there. The general feeling seemed to be that Had-Sudol would have to die as an object lesson to his kind, but that his death would be delayed until the chief and his ten warriors returned.

IT WAS a worried and confused girl, therefore, who slid down the rope to Had-Sudol's cell later that afternoon. As she reached the ledge, a crude stone bowl of food held under one arm, the splendid figure of the young Andaraian appeared in the cave opening.

"Duleen!" he exclaimed. "You came back after all!"

The relief and happiness in his voice went through her with a pleasant little shock. Silently she extended the stone bowl, but her trembling fingers gave her away. He brushed it aside and she was in his arms.

At last he put her gently from him and looked deep into her eyes while her breathing grew calm again and her lips ceased their quivering.

"I love you, Duleen." The words were barely a whisper, but there was no doubting their sincerity, even as his mind shouted that a nobleman of Andara could not say such things to a wild girl of the caves.

In answer, the girl dropped her face into her hands and began to cry—long wracking sobs that shook her slender shoulders like a reed in a high wind.

"What is it, my darling?" He took hold of her tenderly and drew her into the shelter of the cave. "Does my love hurt you so much?"

She shook her head wildly, still sobbing. "Th-they are going to kill y-you!"

She felt his body stiffen and heard the sharp intake of his breath. A hand caught her under the chin and lifted her face until he could see into her eyes again. "Kill me?" he repeated, his voice calm. "Who is going to kill me, Duleen?"

"My father. He says you will tell the other gods where we are and they will come here and slay us all."

"Other gods?" the man repeated, puzzled. "What other gods?"

"They appeared less than half a sun ago," she told him. "From out of the sky, in long shining rocks. Bulat saw them as they came to rest in the valley and from them came gods such as you."

For a moment it was as though her words had turned him to stone. Then he shouted aloud with a mixture of relief and exultation. "They came! By Novah, they came! Ana-Bet must have—"

The rush of words stopped abruptly as the picture of Andara's princess as last he had seen her rose unbidden to his mind's eye.

IT WAS during the days, three years before, when he had been the fair-haired boy of the court of Tar-Jando, Ana-Bet's father and emperor of Andara, the most powerful nation on all Tarvius. Had-Sudol was in his early twenties then—a handsome, devil-may-care youngster who knew more about flying-ships than any expert had a right to. He built them from the ground up, he tinkered with their motors, adding refinements and inventions of his own until, almost single-handedly he had torn apart the air-force of one of Andara's neighbors during one of the intermittent wars between them.

And it was about that time when Tar-Jando's only child, the princess Ana-Bet, had indicated very clearly that she had marked Had-Sudol for her own. She was no more than eighteen—a leggy, big-eyed imperious combination of a girl and woman whose moods were as stormy and unpredictable as they were brief. She made a habit of showing up wherever the young airman was—watching him for hours while he developed the principle of harnessing magnetic fields as a source of power. His attitude was pretty much that of a brother toward a younger sister; and while this was a relationship far from what Ana-Bet had in mind, she was content to bide her time, confident that eventually he would take his nose out of the mazes of machinery long enough to realize she was a very beautiful and desirable woman.

And then one day Had-Sudol took her into his confidence. He had, it seemed, solved the last barrier between interplanetary travel, and he proposed to set out for Tarvius' nearest neighbor—the green world called Eonia. No one else, he told her, was to know his plans until after he had taken off.

Ana-Bet was intelligent enough to

know that opposing him in his mad venture would only cost her what slight inroads she had already made on his heart. So she beat back her fear, helped him obtain supplies in secret, and at his request hid away a duplicate set of plans for Andara's military case he did not return.

Not until the cold gray dawn when they stood alone beside his small one-man flyer, its nose pointed skyward, did Ana-Bet betray her love for Had-Sudol. As he said goodbye and turned to enter the craft, she had thrown her arms about his neck and kissed him again and again, whispering brokenly that she loved him and would not know happiness until he returned safely to her. Touched by the unashamed ardor of her love, swayed by the dramatic setting of the moment, the young man had responded with equal ardor, murmuring words that gave Ana-Bet permanent claim to his heart.

Now, standing on a high stone ledge overlooking a savage world, another girl warm in his arms, Had-Sudol, nobleman of Andara, realized for the first time that gratitude and a momentary affection, not actual love, had been responsible for his promise to Ana-Bet.

The knowledge gave him no comfort. If, as seemed likely, she had brought an expedition so vast a distance to find him, it was because she still loved him.

What was he to do? He could not remain here; the cavemen would kill him. Yet to return to Andara with Ana-Bet would mean spending the rest of his life with a woman he did not love. He knew the princess too well to suppose she would willingly transport a rival to Andara, and he was equally sure she would insist on holding him to his promise to her. Refusal might well mean his death, knowing the princess as he did!

Duleen, puzzled and a little uneasy

by his strained silence, stirred slightly in his arms and he tightened them almost convulsively about her bare shoulders. By Novah, he would not give the cave girl up!

"Listen to me, my darling," he whispered. "Do you love me as I love you?"

In answer she drew his head down and pressed her lips tightly against his own. After a long ecstatic moment he lifted his head and smiled down into her eyes.

"Then this," he said, "is what you must do...."

CHAPTER V

THE CLAMOR of an alarm bell brought Rhon-Dee bolt upright in his bunk. With the smooth ease of a man used to alarms in the night he swung his legs to the floor and into sandals even as his fingers found his tunic. In the corridor outside was the pounding of feet as the ship's crew raced to battle stations.

As he flung open his cabin door and started out, Rhon-Dee spotted the tall broad-shouldered figure of Glat-Stevo coming toward him.

"What's going on, Steve?" the commander demanded.

"Seems the guards have caught some sort of spy. Found him lurking about outside this ship."

"A human?"

The captain shrugged. "I haven't seen him yet—if 'him' is the right word. I called for a general alarm on all ships. Just in case there's more of them skulking around."

"Where is this spy?" Rhon-Dee asked.

"They took him to the ship hospital. I understand they had to knock him over the head with a kodet butt before he could be handled. Strong as ten men, I hear. Killed two of the guards before being subdued."

"Let's have a look at him."

The two officers mounted a ladder to the third level and along the corridor to a small gleaming white room. On a table was the body of an almost naked man of tremendous physical strength, to judge from the way he was built. Even unconscious, his muscles appeared to be as hard as metal. His head was large and perfectly formed, the face singularly handsome even by Tarviisian standards, the smooth clear skin darkly tanned. The eyes were closed, and thick black hair reaching almost to his shoulders fell loosely across one smoothly scraped cheek.

"Human, all right," Glat-Stevo muttered. "In fact the best looking example I can remember having seen."

A thin-faced man in the long white robe of a healer was bent over the unconscious figure applying an unguent of some kind to a nasty looking gash on one side of the leonine head. Across from him two guards, kodets ready in their right hands, watched without expression.

"Is he going to come out of it?" Rhon-Dee asked.

The healer nodded. "He took a nasty crack but he's got a head as hard as the side of this ship. Better bind him down or he's liable to come out of it fighting."

Glat-Stevo gestured to one of the guards. The man holstered his weapon, came up to the table and drew two broad bands of leather, attached to the sides of the metal slab, across the chest of the unconscious man.

A moment later the captive stirred and opened his eyes. At sight of his surroundings and the man bending over him, he shot up one mighty hand and closed it about the healer's throat. The white-robed Andaran sought wildly to free that terrible grip but he might as well have tried to beat in the side of a mountain. Not until one of

the guards stepped forward and brought his kodet butt down on the steel wrist did those incredible fingers relax their hold. The healer collapsed half conscious, livid marks on the skin of his throat. As he fell, the captive lunged up in one superhuman burst of strength that brought a complaining creak from the metal table and tested the straps across his body to their limit. But they held—and the wild man fell back.

"Ask him who he is, Stevo," Rhon-Dee said.

The officer stared at him blankly. "You don't think he'd understand our language, do you?"

"Probably not. But let's make sure."

THERE WAS sudden and sharp silence in the room as Glat-Stevo approached the table. The eyes watching him from that point were a light gray that seemed nearly as opaque as paint. Smooth pliant muscles rippled as bronzed arms tensed to defend their owner.

"Don't get excited, my friend," Glat-Stevo said, his voice calm and unhurried. He stopped just beyond the prisoner's reach. "What is your name? What do they call you?"

The gray eyes stared back at him without expression. The nostrils of the generous clean-lined nose twitched a little but that was the only reaction to the captain's words.

"No use, Rhon-Dee," Glat-Stevo said over his shoulder. "For all his human look and physical development he's no more than a wild animal. Evidently this world is still too young for man to have reached our own stage. Maybe our first ancestors on Tarviis were much the same as this specimen."

The white-robed healer, still on the floor beside the table, lurched to his hands and knees. Moaning softly, he began to crawl across the room, then

stood erect long enough to collapse again, this time into a metal chair. Nobody paid any attention to him.

Commander Rhon-Dee rubbed the side of his jaw thoughtfully. "We've got to find out if he was alone or a scout for a raiding party," he said finally. "Have one of the technicians bring in a translavox."

"Doubt if it'll do much good," Glat-Stevo said. "They only work on a higher intelligence, you know."

"We don't know how intelligent he is. This will be a way to find out."

The captain gave a brief order to one of the guards, who saluted briskly and went out. A moment later he was back, followed by a short fat man of middle age pushing a complex square of wires, tubes, coils and switches mounted on a wheeled table. At sight of the forbidding looking wild man strapped to the slab, the technician halted abruptly.

"Well?" Rhon-Dee said impatiently. "What are you waiting for? There's your subject; get him ready for questioning."

The technician pushed the machine forward another inch, then stopped a second time, eyeing the unrestrained arms dubiously. "He appears capable of resistance, Commander," he said in a voice that could have been steadier.

Rhon-Dee made a sign to the guard. The man drew his kodet, set a tiny rheostat in the base of its grip and leveled the muzzle at the captive. There followed a brief crackling sound; the caveman's body jerked spasmodically once and then slumped back in the limpness of unconsciousness.

Quickly the guard put away his weapon and stepped to the table and readjusted the straps so that they confined the arms as well as the giant frame. Reassured, the technician now wheeled his compact mechanism

up to the table and attached a set of electrodes to the captive's temples. From the electrodes ran two fine wires ending in two incredibly sensitive button microphones. From the first pair of wires depended two others that disappeared into the body of the translavox.

At instructions from Rhon-Dee, Glat-Stevo took over. He drew a chair up beside the table where the captive still lay unconscious. The captain fastened one of the button microphones to his own ear and held the other in his hand, waiting.

The caveman's eyes fluttered open and burned into Glat-Stevo's with such unmasked hatred that the captain felt a prickle of fear for the first time since he could remember.

ORIGINALLY the translavox had been designed to read the thoughts of enemy spies who did not want their thoughts known and who were able successfully to endure torture. When, as a means of circumventing the machine, agents started getting their messages in code, refinements had been added that arranged even coded thoughts into familiar words. From this point, it was a short step to improving the machine to where it could work in reverse: enabling someone who spoke no known language to understand that of the Andarans.

Depressing a tiny button on the mechanism, Glat-Stevo said, "Who are you?" into the microphone he was holding.

Open astonishment dropped the captive's jaw. He did not move or speak, but almost at once Glat-Stevo said to Rhon-Dee: "He understands me. And he does not know how to shield his thoughts. His name is Valar."

The commander nodded. "See what else he can tell you."

Glat-Stevo was about to put another

question to the man on the table when the corridor room opened and the princess Ana-Bet swept into the room. The pale green tunic she wore set off the luxuriant glory of her jet black hair and the liquid depths of brown eyes. She paused just inside the door, frowning slightly at sight of the tremendous young man on the table.

"They told me you were in here," she said to Rhon-Dee. "What does this mean?"

In a few words the commander explained what had happened. "We want to find out," he finished, "if there is danger of attack from others of his kind. Also, if he knows anything of Had-Sudol."

From where he lay on the table, Valar watched the scene around him with awed wonder. He knew that he was helpless in the hands of gods; but the knowledge brought no feeling of panic, for he realized that, physically at least, he was more than a match for several of them at one time. Nor were they immortal; he was sure that the warrior whose neck his knife had torn was dead. No, it was only in the strange things they possessed that their advantage lay. Like the things fastened to his head and to the thin vines leading to the ear and mouth of the god seated next to him. He had heard the god speak strange sounding words which his own ears did not understand but which, in his mind, were in the language of his own tribe!

From the corners of his eyes Valar stared at the girl who had just entered this white cave. He saw how humbly these gods treated her and his lip curled slightly. Did the gods allow a woman to rule them, then? True, she was beautiful beyond any woman he had ever seen before. But she was still a woman—fit only to prepare food and cure the pelts of jungle beasts for the use of warriors.

Yet there was something about

her.... His eyes dwelt appreciatively on her long, slender, delicately rounded limbs—on the smooth swell of her hips, the narrow waist, the mystic enchantment of firm breasts, the delicate column of her throat.

An emotion new to Valar but as old as the universe he knew nothing about was taking form within him. Suddenly he wanted to put a hand on her, to stroke her hair, to press his mouth against those full red lips....

VALAR SWALLOWED hard against a formless and unfamiliar lump in his throat and shifted his gaze to the girl's face—and found her staring directly into his eyes. Their glances met, locked, held—and it was the princess who first looked away, a dull wave of red sweeping up from her neck and into her cheeks.

"He seems to be a handsome beast," she said carelessly to Rhon-Dee. "See what you can find out from him."

Once more Glat-Stevo began to question the young cave lord. "You have told me your name is Valar. Where do you live?"

Again Valar heard words he did not understand but whose meaning was clear to his mind. He said, "The woman is good to look upon. Does she belong to you?"

Despite himself, Glat-Stevo grinned. Ana-Bet must indeed be a revelation to this untamed giant. Well, better men had fallen under her spell. With an effort he erased the smile.

"You must answer my questions," he said. "Where do you live?"

"In the caves of Poxex," Valar replied indifferently.

"Where are they?"

"I will not tell you that."

"You have already told me; you cannot control your thoughts."

Valar blinked, puzzled.

"Are there many of you?" Glat-Stevo asked.

"As many as the leaves of the forest!"

"Where are the warriors of your tribe?"

"They are waiting for you to leave the shelter of your rocks. Then they will fall upon you and kill you all!"

After a moment's silence Glat-Stevo spoke again. "You are lying. You could not understand how I know that, but this—" he pointed to the squat machine—"tells me such things. I know that you came here alone and that none of your people know where you are."

Valar grunted. "They will find out," he said. "When I do not return they will hunt for me. Then they will kill you."

"With what?" Glat-Stevo said with quiet amusement. "The crude kind of weapons we took from you?"

"You will see!" But the doubt in Valar's tone was unmistakable.

The captain abruptly switched the subject. "Tell me, Valar, are there other tribes such as yours near here?"

The caveman moved a shoulder. "There are others. I do not know where. I heard once that farther toward the place where Oru rises another tribe has its caves. I do not know this for I have never been beyond this valley."

Glat-Stevo eyed him steadily for a long time before he asked his next question. The translavox informed him the wild man's answers were true; now that he was giving such co-operation, his next answer might cut short the expedition's stay on this insane planet.

"Have you," he said suddenly, "ever seen men like us before?"

"No," Valar said absently. It was evident he was becoming bored. His eyes were back on the Princess Ana-Bet, causing the translavox to give Glat-Stevo a confused jumble of thoughts running through the cap-

tive's mind.

HE DISENGAGED the two tiny microphones and rose from the chair. The technician came forward, removed the electrodes and wheeled the machine from the room.

"Anything we can use, Stevo?" Rhon-Dee said.

"I doubt it. Evidently he caught sight of our ships just before they landed and came to investigate. I'm satisfied that we're the first civilized people he's ever seen—which would tend to prove he knows nothing of the noble Had-Sudol."

"Then he's no further use to us?"

"Probably not."

The commander turned away indifferently. "Then have a couple of the guards take him out somewhere and kill him." He took the arm of the princess. "Shall I see you to your quarters, Your Highness?"

At the door, Ana-Bet turned back impulsively and looked searchingly at the splendid figure on the table. He was watching her again, and even across the room she could see something in the depths of his eyes that sent tiny feet scampering up her spine.

"Why kill him, Rhon-Dee?" she said slowly. "Why shouldn't he be released unharmed?"

The commander tried valiantly to keep an impassive expression but his eyes gave him away. Clearly they indicated that she must have lost her senses. "Your Highness was not informed, of course, that this barbarian slew two of our men before he was captured."

"What of it? Surely you would not refuse anyone the right to defend himself."

Rhon-Dee's lips stiffened into a straight line. "Also, were we to allow him to go, he would return with his men to attack us."

"Does the prospect frighten you?" she asked with poisonous sweetness.

He flushed clear to the roots of his hair. "If Her Highness will instruct me," he said harshly.

Instead, Ana-Bet glanced at the stiff-backed Glat-Stevo. "Have the wild man locked up somewhere," she said. "Perhaps I will question him myself in the morning before I decide what is to be done with him."

CHAPTER VI

HAD-SUDOL lay belly-flat on the narrow ledge outside his lofty, lonely cell. In the clearing below burned a roaring fire of dry branches, its leaping yellow flames pushing back the impenetrable blackness of a jungle night.

For a long time now he had lain there, watching the silhouetted figures of the women and old men of Ulgo's tribe as they milled uncertainly about the blaze. A handful of warriors leaned uneasily on their spears, eyes rolling nervously at the fringes of nocturnal jungle nearby. Now and then the voice of one of the great cats tore apart the brooding silence and sent the cave people huddling closer to the fire as though its heat might ward off the chill of fear sweeping over them.

The young nobleman's fingers drummed nervously against the stone. Why didn't she come? Already she was more than an hour late. It was at least three hours ago that Ulgo and his ten warriors had returned from their scouting trip. Had-Sudol had watched a new force assemble shortly before dusk, and not long afterward the chief and more than a hundred heavily armed warriors—almost the entire fighting strength of the tribe—had disappeared into the mouth of a game trail toward the west.

It seemed incredible to Had-Sudol

that they might actually be preparing to attack the visitors from Andara. As mighty as the cavemen were physically, their muscles and puny, crude weapons would be worse than useless against the terrible armaments of the Andarans.

But there were more urgent matters to worry about. Slowly the fear began to rise in him that Duleen had suffered a change of heart, that she regretted giving her love to one whom she must now look upon as an enemy of her people. A vision of her as she had looked while in his arms rose to plague him. The clinging, silken sheen of golden hair against his caressing fingers, the warmth of her softly curved body against his own, the mingled fire and benediction of her quivering mouth as she returned his kisses.... Had-Sudol clenched his fists until the nails dug painfully into perspiring palms.

From behind him a slight sound brought the young man quickly to his feet. In the faint reflection of the firelight below he made out the slender, briefly-clad figure of Ulgo's daughter.

An instant later she was in his arms. "Duleen, Duleen!" he whispered brokenly, all doubt forgotten. "I knew you would come!"

She placed soft fingers against his lips to halt the tumbling words. "It was not easy. I thought the guards at the top of the cliff would never go away. I finally told them they were needed below—that I would keep watch for a while. The elders fear that the gods may attack us while our warriors are away."

Had-Sudol glanced uneasily toward the fire below. "Then we must hurry if we are to get away before they come back."

The girl stared at the dark line of towering trees beyond the clearing and shivered a little in his embrace.

"The jungle is no place to be at night," she murmured. "Even our bravest fighters dare not enter it unless many of them are together."

"We will go only a little way," the man said. "Then we can climb into a tree and wait until the night has passed. Once Oru rises we will hurry on and join my friends."

Still the girl held back. "Your friends," she said. "Will they like me? I am so different from them."

"They will love you as I do!" Had-Sudol declared fervently. "You will see!"

But even as he spoke the words, a tiny nagging doubt pried at his mind. Would they accept this half-naked primitive as unconditionally as he had? The thought of her in the intrigue-ridden court of Andara, filled with its posturing opportunists, made him wince.

And Ana-Bet? How would she take this rebuff? How would she react to finding that this blonde savage had taken the man she loved? With cold and deadly fury—unless her entire nature had changed since last he saw her!

For the first time Had-Sudol began to question this suddenly born love for the cave girl. Perhaps he did not really love her. It was another emotion entirely—one brought on by the sheer loneliness of three dreary years cut off from the companionship of everybody other than an old, old woman.

The shrill scream of a panther from the forest depths beyond the fire jerked him from his reverie. "Come, Duleen," he said, almost harshly. "Let's get out of here!"

A moment later the girl was disappearing into the night above him, drawing herself up lithely, hand over hand, along a slender strand of grass rope anchored somewhere overhead. He waited until the rope swung free,

then slowly he began to follow, grunting a little with the effort, for it had been a long time since he had tried anything so strenuous.

But the hours of exercise during his years of imprisonment paid off. Presently he dragged himself over the lip of the escarpment and rose gingerly to his feet.

A smooth warm hand came out of the blanket of blackness around him, caught his fingers in a reassuring grip. "This way," Duleen whispered close to his ear. "Follow me."

Blindly Had-Sudol gave himself over to her guidance. They took a few steps, when suddenly a hoarse voice shouted almost in their faces and simultaneously the haft of a spear caught the Andaran a ringing blow alongside the head, bringing him to his knees. A fog rolled into his brain as he fell, and cutting through it came Duleen's cry of fear.

* * *

"**B**UT WHY, Ana-Bet?" Rhon-Dee's brow was creased into deep lines of complete bafflement. "He's no more than an animal. Why waste a full day of a technician's time on this—this freak?"

The commander of the expedition was seated behind the desk in his quarters. In a chair across from him sat the dark-haired princess of Andara, ruler since the death of her father of the mightiest country of all Tarvius.

It was not so much the princess' request that bothered Rhon-Dee; it was an indefinable something in her eyes and her almost expressionless expression that he did not like.

"You question my wishes, Commander?" Ana-Bet said icily.

Rhon-Dee's jaw tightened and his eyes were suddenly angry. His voice came out with a harshness the girl had never heard there before. "We are alone here," he said. "I tell you

now I do 'question your wishes'! I would not be following my duties as commander of this force if I failed to do so. The only man able to operate the machine already has his hands full setting up the delicate mechanism with which we expect to find some trace of Had-Sudol's missing ship. It requires two full days—possibly even longer—to get it adjusted. And now you want him taken off that job because of some idle whim! Do you plan to remain on this Novah-for-saken planet forever?"

She ignored the bitterness behind the man's question. "And if I *order* you to do it?"

Rhon-Dee's stony gaze did not waver. "Let me remind Her Highness that the machine she *orders* used on the captive can be extremely dangerous for the subject. The slightest mistake on the operator's part may rupture the blood vessels of the brain, causing death."

"I understand the technician is highly competent."

"He is also human!" Rhon-Dee snapped. "Right now his mind is concentrated on one job. Take him from it and force another in its place without giving him a day or two of rest—and the result might well be...unfortunate."

Abruptly Ana-Bet changed her tactics. "Just for an hour or so, Dee," she pleaded winningly. "Just so he can understand the rudiments of our language. You saw how he feared and mistrusted the translavox; perhaps if I could talk to him in words he could understand—perhaps then he will be able to tell us something about Had-Sudol."

A corner of Rhon-Dee's lips lifted in a smile that was not amused. "As you said earlier: he *is* a handsome beast...."

The princess' breath caught sharply—then she was out of her chair

like a singed cat and a firm hand flashed in a sweeping arc that ended against the commander's left cheek.

For a long moment the two remained as if frozen—the girl half leaning across the desk, her eyes blazing, the man still seated, face expressionless, a red blotch staining the skin where the blow had landed.

Then almost casually he reached out and flipped one of the tiny switches set into the desk top.

"Have Technician Flav-Broom report to me immediately," he said....

CHAPTER VII

AS HAD-SUDOL crumpled, his strength sapped by the savage blow, a feeling of hopelessness and despair welled up within him. So close to freedom—and now, even if he lived, it would mean a return to an eternity of empty days and nights, forever a prisoner.

But both he and his attackers reckoned without a girl in love—and therein lay their error.

Like a lioness bereft of her cubs, the daughter of Ulgo turned on the two warriors. From the belt of the nearest man she snatched a stone knife and plunged it to the hilt into his chest. Voicing a single choked scream he collapsed, and ere the second guard could recover his wits, the blood-stained flint caught him full in the throat, putting a grisly period to his startled cry.

And then the weapon was falling from the girl's nerveless grasp as, with a shudder of horror, she buried her face in her hands and dry convulsive sobs racked her slender body.

Comforting arms closed tenderly about her and she clung tightly to the still dazed Had-Sudol. He was a little amazed at the depths of the girl's grief, for her life in this savage world must have accustomed her to sudden

and violent death.

Her first words made clear the reason for her distress. "T-they were my friends," she choked. "All my life I have known them, talked, laughed, quarreled with them. And now I have *k-killed* them!"

The man made no effort to halt her words, but simply tightened his hold while the paroxysm of revulsion and self-reproach ran its course. When finally she grew calmer, he said, "There was no other way, Duleen; it was them or us. Come, we must go before others of the tribe find us—and them."

Carefully they crossed the ribbon of grass until the black wall of trees and jungle rose to confront them. From those Cimmerian depths came the restless rustle and sly stirrings of a night wind through tangled vegetation: sounds magnified by Had-Sudol's untrained ears into the pad of taloned paws and the scrape of sleek tawny hides against vines and bushes. Brave as the next man, confident of his own prowess, still he unconsciously moved closer to the girl at the thought of entering the forbidding territory.

To Duleen, this was familiar though undesirable ground. Turning left she skirted the forest edge, the man at her heels, until she reached a narrow break in the wall of trees.

"A game trail," she told Had-Sudol, whispering. "It turns and twists, but after a while it leads almost straight to the valley where Bulat said the shining rocks lay. There you will find your people."

Had-Sudol eyed the thin opening with misgivings. "We'd better get started," he said.

"I am staying here."

The man stiffened, bewildered. "Staying? But I thought—"

"Don't you see?" she said, a note of pleading in her voice. "We are not the same. A god can not mate with

one who is not a god—any more than Conta, the lioness, can mate with Aka, the lightning!"

"But, Duleen," he pleaded. "I love you! I've loved you since the moment you stood there in the cave staring at me."

The darkness prevented him from seeing the tender smile that touched her lips, the involuntary lifting of her hands to touch him—a gesture she instantly suppressed.

"I know," she murmured. "And after a while, when you saw how different I was from the women of your people, you would begin to hate me. I could not bear that—I would rather lose you now than see that happen!"

Time, Had-Sudol realized, was running out. At any moment relief might arrive for the guards, and discovery of those two lifeless bodies would bring a hornet's nest down upon the fugitives' heads.

And so he acted—acted as one of Ulgo's own warriors might have done. Before Duleen was aware of what he intended, Had-Sudol caught her roughly about the waist and flung her over one of his broad shoulders. More as a startled reaction to this unexpected violence, the girl began to kick and squirm; but Had-Sudol only tightened his hold and trotted through the opening in the jungle ramparts.

As the man and the woman he carried disappeared into that velvet well, Tarka, the panther, rose with casual silence from the concealing depths of verdure nearby and slunk cautiously along the game trail behind them.

* * *

FOR MORE than an hour now no word had been spoken in the small square white-walled room. Only the low steady hum of an electric motor and the deep regular breathing of the young giant on the table broke the silence.

Technician Flav-Broom, probably

the greatest scientist in Tarvius' long history, glanced wearily at the chronometer strapped to one of his bony wrists. Another hour under the multiple and incredibly sensitive impulses of the Cephalscribe, Flav-Breom's greatest invention of a long and incredible list of inventions, and this half-naked savage should be able both to understand and speak the language of his captors. Not fluently, of course; that would require a full eight to twelve hours. But enough so that he could understand and be understood.

The scrawny, half-bald little scientist glanced slyly at the princess Ana-Bet seated across the table from him, her chin resting in one palm, eyes intent on the sleeping man and the crown of electrodes and trailing wires he wore. Let her tell the commander fancy stories! He, Flav-Breom, knew the real reason she wanted the captive to know her language! A handsome face and rolling muscles—and every woman, princess or slave, swooned with ecstasy! But no use for a man to whisper words of love if they could not be understood....

"Is he all right, Flav-Breom?"

The little scientist nodded. "Of course. He sleeps like a child while the current engraves a memory of our tongue in his mind."

"But he has not moved since you began."

"How do you expect him to?" the technician said testily. "He's held to the table with straps *four* men could not break."

She looked relieved. "True. It's only that Rhon-Dee mentioned that the slightest mistake could kill him."

Flav-Breom was offended. "There can be no mistake while I'm here! Have you forgotten that I *made* the Cephalscribe, that it was I who discovered the prin—"

"I know," Ana-Bet said hastily. "None questions your wisdom, Flav-

Breom. It's just that..." Her voice trailed off.

The technician was mollified. "See that?" he said, pointing to one of several dials set into the machine. "As long as the indicating needle does not reach the dial's red zone, nor slip back into the black zone, the subject is safe. And the moment he is ready and I cut the power, he will wake from his sleep and can talk with you. Another hour—two at the most—will be enough."

Again there was silence and the minutes passed slowly and monotonously. From beyond the closed door came the occasional slither of a sandaled foot along the metal corridor as a guard made his rounds. The barely audible purr of air-conditioning was so constant as to be unnoticed. The princess Ana-Bet remained on the white metal stool near the table, watching the swelling chest of the young giant, the magnificent shoulders, the banded layers of muscle sheathing his body. Clearly he made every other male of her knowledge suffer by comparison!

What would it be like, she wondered, to belong to such a man? To share his untamed life, to wander the jungle trails beside him, to spend the nights in his arms in some lofty cave? She felt her cheeks glow at such thoughts, but she could not put them from her.

And then there was Had-Sudol; what of him? It was he she wanted, he who held her heart. Yet she might as well face it: Had-Sudol was dead, for he could hardly have survived three years in this savage world. Was she truly in love with him—or with the memory of what he had meant to her while she was no more than a child? What if, instead, she took this splendid creature back to Andara—there to shape him, to build him into a nobleman of her court. She pictured him as he would appear in the green tunic of

royalty. Somehow the prospect was less attractive than if he were still clad in the scrap of animal skin he now wore about his hips. Yes, it would be wrong to remove him from his natural surroundings, to transplant him among the hothouse blooms of her own world.

SO ENGROSSED was the princess in her thoughts that she did not hear the first flurry of battle as Ulgo and his hundred warriors launched their attack on the space ships.

Suddenly the hair-raising scream of a mortally wounded man tore apart the silence, and the pounding of running feet echoed in the corridor outside. Flav-Breom, eyes round with shock, bounded to his feet and threw open the door.

A wave of deep-tanned, half-naked bodies rolled along the corridor, sweeping before it a thin line of white-tunicked Andarans. Stone knives licked out and defenders fell before they could bring their deadly kodets into use. Those who did succeed in freeing those weapons from their belts had them battered from their hands before over-anxious fingers could press the firing buttons.

It was not that the warriors of Andara lacked courage or cool heads; it was simply that the attack had been so completely a surprise and the enemy so strange, that panic was at first unavoidable. The guards outside lay dead, sightless eyes staring at the night sky, arrow hafts protruding from their bodies—victims of as carefully planned and executed an ambush as even the Andarans themselves could have arranged. Thus the cavemen were able to enter the space ships in force before those within even dreamed that an attack was under way.

As Flav-Breom flung open the door, three of Ulgo's warriors spied him. With a savage snarl one lifted his

spear and drove its point full into the little scientist's thin, unprotected chest. So tremendous was the power behind the thrust that the technician was lifted completely from his feet and thrown backward half across the room. Already dead, Flav-Breom's body plowed into the labyrinth of wires, tubes, coils and condensers that made up the Cephalscribe.

A soundless flash of blue flame caused the three cavemen to leap back from the doorway in alarm. Ana-Bet, breaking the chains of fear that held her, leaped forward and slammed the door. But as she fumbled for the lock, a brawny shoulder drove into the planks from the opposite side and she staggered back.

The first caveman swung up his knife to skewer the shrinking, terror-stricken princess. But one of his companions knocked the blade aside.

"Fool!" he spat. "There are better uses for a woman this shapely!"

One calloused hand shot out and caught the paralyzed girl by the wrist. Weakly she clawed at those steel fingers, but the burly brute only roared with laughter and drew her slowly, savoringly, into his arms.

The leering, evil face bent slowly toward her. She could see the lust-distorted features, feel fingers groping at the neckline of her tunic, smell the fetid breath from his half-open, drooling lips. Her senses swam under the impact of pure horror and she felt her body grow limp.

It was then that Valar opened his eyes.

CHAPTER VIII

AFTER a couple of hundred feet, Had-Sudol failed to notice a bend in the trail and blundered squarely into the bole of a jungle patriarch. Half-stunned, he loosened his hold on the cave girl and she wriggled

free.

Had Duleen made an attempt, then, she would have easily gotten away. Instead, she took the young man by an arm and drew him back to the game trail.

They stood there for several minutes while Had-Sudol's labored breathing slowed and the trembling of exhaustion left his limbs. When finally he felt he could trust his voice, he said:

"You could have run away just now, Duleen."

"I know," she said, almost inaudibly.

"Why didn't you?"

The darkness hid her tender smile. "Maybe I did not want to think of you wandering around in the jungle by yourself. Even if one of the big cats didn't get you, you'd never find your way to the valley of shining rocks. Where the forest is concerned, you are more helpless than a little child."

The words stung Had-Sudol's pride, although there was enough truth in them to keep him silent. Presently the girl said, "We are still too close to the caves. Let us go on for a while before we find a tree in which to remain until dawn."

Silently Had-Sudol turned and strode ahead, the girl following. As they moved on, the cave girl continued speaking, her voice barely more than a whisper.

"Walk lightly, using only the balls of your feet. Stop suddenly from time to time, straining your ears to learn if Kraga, the lion, or Conta, his mate, or Tarka, the panther, is stalking you. Be alert as you round each turn in the path, for it is in such places that Shanda, the leopard, waits for his prey."

This was jungle lore, straight from one who had been born while a lion roared over the body of its kill less

than a hundred yards from the caves where her mother lay in labor, from one to whom the forest aisles were as familiar as the controls of a flier to Had-Sudol. And, as intelligent men always do, he listened when experience spoke—listened and remembered.

LESS THAN half an hour later the trail abruptly widened and became a small clearing covered by tangled grasses and the reed-lined banks of a tiny stream. Had-Sudol was all for plunging ahead and slaking his thirst, but the girl's hand at his arm held him back.

"It is the way of the great beasts to lie in wait among the river reeds," she told him. "Those who rush to water seldom live to cool their throats. We must wait a moment and make sure there is no danger."

They stood there, silent and unmoving as stone, listening, straining their eyes to pierce the gloom-shrouded banks of the brook. In Had-Sudol's right hand was a stout length of branch which he had picked up earlier on the game trail.

It was while they stood there, all their attention on the possible danger ahead, that Tarka, the panther, stepped delicately in the clearing not ten feet behind them.

Oddly enough, it was Had-Sudol who first sensed their peril. It seemed almost as if he was feeling a cold breath moving along the length of his spine—a sensation that cut through his preoccupation with making sure the way was open for quenching his thirst.

Almost without thinking, he turned his head sharply and glanced over his shoulder...and the blood seemed to freeze in his veins. Almost within arm's length, what little light there was picking out tooth and fang and gleaming eyes, was the savage head and tawny body of a giant cat.

Had-Sudol's involuntary gasp was enough to bring the girl about. She took one look at the fearsome head so near and a single sharp cry broke from her lips. And at that instant, Tarka, voicing a shrill scream, sprang toward his prey!

Whether he acted from bravery or the madness of fear, Had-Sudol never knew; but instead of trying to avoid the cat's charge, the man leaped blindly forward to meet it. As he came, he brought up high above his head the thick branch he carried, then swung it down in a vicious arc.

Tarka, having gauged his leap accurately, was totally unprepared for his intended victim's attempt to close with him. As a result, both talons and fangs were out of position for defense and there was no way for the giant cat to avoid the descending branch.

There came the dull crunch of splintered bone and, Tarka, skull caved in like a rotten fruit, seemed to halt in midair, then dropped in a limp heap in the center of the trail, dead where he fell. Had-Sudol stood there, slack-jawed with stupefaction, the splintered remnants of the branch still clutched tightly in his hand.

Duleen came up to him and said in an awed voice, "No warrior in all my father's tribe ever slew Tarka with nothing but a tree branch. Only a god could be that brave and that mighty!"

The young nobleman would have liked nothing better than to toss the handful of splinters aside with a careless gesture and put on a bored expression. But his peril was too recent, his relief too complete, for any such histrionics. He tried to speak but the words caught in his throat and he could do little more than gasp unintelligibly.

"Let's find that tree!" he finally managed to say. "And the higher the better!"

VALAR, warrior of the tribe of Po-lex, opened his eyes to find himself half buried in the wreckage of what he last remembered as the thing that had plunged him into the black pit of unconsciousness.

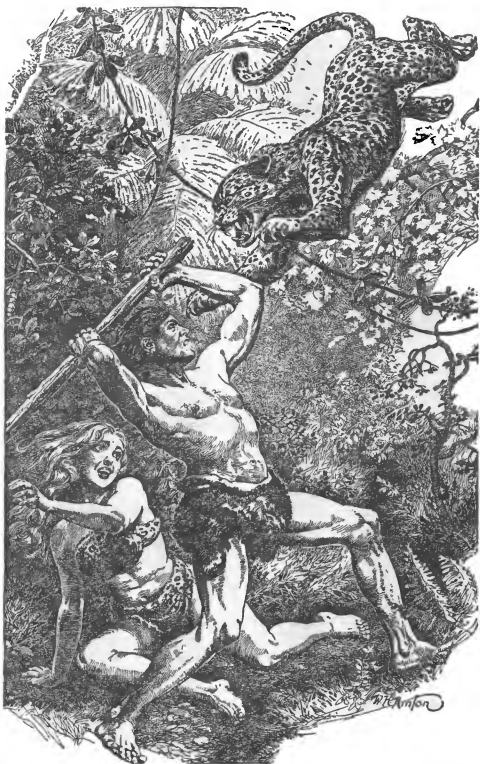
His sharp eyes caught sight of the beautiful girl who had sat near him and watched intently while a scrawny elderly little man attached odd vines to his head. Now she was struggling furiously in the grasp of a leering caveman while two others watched in grinning approval. From beyond the room came the curses, groans and screams of men locked in mortal combat.

The three cavemen, Valar saw instantly, were members of some other tribe. This could only mean that they would kill him, once they caught sight of his bound and helpless body.

He bent his head and glanced at the broad leather straps confining his chest and arms. Before this he had made no serious attempt to test their strength, for always the watchful eyes of guards were on him. Drawing breath deeply into his lungs, he began to exert steadily increasing pressure, forcing his body up and his sinewy arms out from his sides. The leather groaned, stretched slightly—and held. Without for a moment relaxing, Valar continued to press against his bonds, closing his mind to the pain as their edges began to cut into his skin.

Mighty were the muscles of Valar, but in those leather thongs was strength enough to hold back an elephant. Fortunately, however, the metal flanges to which they were secured proved to be comparatively weak. Under the enormous pressure two of them snapped almost simultaneously and the caveman was free.

And none too soon! Already one of the hulking intruders was moving toward him, knife in hand, a grimace



Hed-Sudel never knew whether he acted from bravery or insane fear as he attacked the deadly cat

of blood lust twisting his coarse features.

As a swimmer dives from a river bank, Valar shot from the high table. His catapulting body caught the other full in the belly, driving the air from his lungs in an audible "whoosh" and leaving him gasping and helpless on the floor.

Valar stopped quickly, hoping to wrest the stone knife from the fallen man's limp grasp. But the remaining pair, suddenly aware of their peril, leaped upon him before he could seize the weapon. Under their weight Valar fell to his knees as a flint blade struck full at his unprotected back.

Ana-Bet, hands pressed to her cheeks, eyes staring in stark horror, cried out in warning.

But Valar, veteran of many such battles, had anticipated the knife thrust. Even as he fell, he was twisting aside and the length of flint succeeded only in plowing a thin furrow in his side. Before the warrior of Ulgo could make a second attempt, strong fingers closed on his wrist and the bone snapped like a dry twig.

A howl of pain ripped from the man's throat and he rolled away as Valar leaped to his feet. The remaining warrior was no coward. Drawing his knife he flung himself upon the unarmed cave lord with all the silent ferocity of Kraga, the lion.

With the speed of light, Valar avoided the slashing blade, then lashed out with one rock-like fist backed by every ounce of weight he possessed. Bones splintered sickeningly, vertebrae snapped, and the lifeless clay of what had been one of Ulgo's finest fighting men crumpled to the floor.

VALAR SCOOPED up a stray knife and was bounding toward the open door, and freedom, when the sight of the girl huddled in one

corner of the room brought him to a skidding halt.

As those blazing eyes fell upon her, a wave of faintness turned the princess' legs to water. Through a blur of tears she saw him hesitate, then turn and advance toward her, knife in hand, unmistakable menace in every line of that splendid body.

"No!" she gasped. "Don't—don't kill me!"

He stopped abruptly, and seeing this the girl gained courage, feeling that her plea was taking effect. "I will help you escape," she went on. "They will listen to me. They must, for—"

It was not her words that had stopped Valar; it was instead the startled awareness that he could now understand *what* she was saying. The reason for this phenomenon was unknown to him; in fact, he failed to wonder at it. But for some not clearly understood reason the fact that he could understand her made her of far more value to him than a possible hostage. What form that value might take he was not as yet aware, nor was there time for analysis.

Before she realized his intention, a tanned arm darted out and caught her about the waist. Wildly she struck out, but the cave youth ignored the blows and swung her lightly to his shoulder. Abandoning hope, the princess clung there as Valar turned and bolted through the door.

Some twenty or thirty feet down the corridor to his left was a hatchway open to the night air. Between him and that exit, however, were fully a dozen of Ulgo's half-naked warriors. Of the space-ships' defenders there was no sign other than several torn corpses in blood-stained tunics strewn about the passageway.

Valar saw the enemy seconds before they caught sight of him and his lovely burden—and in that slim advan-

tage lay his only chance for escape. So quickly did his agile brain seize upon it that to the princess there was no appreciable pause from the moment he entered the corridor until he was racing along it with great leaping strides.

The pound of naked feet was the first warning the cavemen were given; and as they whirled to face this new danger, Valar was already in their midst. Clutching the princess tightly, he laid about him with great sweeping blows of his free arm, upsetting men like saplings before a raging hurricane. Twice the knife in his hand drew blood: once slashing a naked chest from neck to groin, and again slashing a throat as its owner sought to impale Valar upon a spear.

So completely had Ulgo's men been taken by surprise, so devastating the attack by this lone warrior, that not even a hand was laid on him. Gaining the narrow hatch, he plunged through it and into the blackness beyond, before most of the survivors fully realized what had taken place.

MEANWHILE the tide had begun to turn in the battle raging in and around the row of space ships. So great had been the element of surprise that Ulgo's numerically inferior forces came very close to outright victory. Already three of the vessels were in the cavemen's hands, and only inability to make use of the stores of captured weapons kept them from turning the fight into a rout.

Rhon-Dee, commander of the expedition, had been forced to quit the flagship early in the fight, having used an emergency hatch in his cabin to make his escape. Blundering blindly through the night in an effort to find enough stragglers to form a counter-attack, the officer barely managed to avoid death time and again. The searchlights he found to be battered

into uselessness and their crews dead around them. It was this absence of illumination more than any other single factor, perhaps, that made his task nearly impossible. For the wild men of this planet were much at home in the darkness of jungle nights—a darkness beyond that of anything in the Andarans' experience—and they could recognize a foe and kill him while the visitors were still trying to make up their minds.

Finally Rhon-Dee managed to gather a few survivors together and equip them with kodets. With these flame pistols the men from Andara were able to turn favorably the fight going on in one of the ships, wiping out the cavemen there who had forced an entrance. From its store rooms, Rhon-Dee had several searchlights brought out into the open and set up in such a way that, at a signal from him, they would light up the area about the ships.

The commander, lips drawn into a hard straight line, made a final inspection before giving word for the lights to go on. He could hear the sobbing breathing of his men, the nervous shuffle of their feet in the long grass, and he sensed their burning hatred of an enemy like none they had ever faced before. In spite of the ordeal they were undergoing there was nothing of fear in them, and Rhon-Dee knew a quiet pride that this was so.

He crouched between two of the searchlights and checked the kodet in his hand. A last slow look around—then:

"Now!"

Instantly the clearing was flooded with light—light that seemed, after the intense darkness, to rival the radiance of the sun. At first the Andarans could do nothing more than blink helplessly while their eyes adjusted to the brilliance; then they be-

gan to make out the half-naked forms of Ulgo's men caught in the rays like insects on pins.

Thin rays of fire began to lance out from the kodets of Rhon-Dee's men and running figures fell to rise no more. Several made a valiant but completely useless attempt to charge the small group about the searchlights, and one by one they died long before they were close enough to throw their spears or release their arrows.

Suddenly Rhon-Dee grabbed the controls of the light nearest him and swung its rays to cover an open hatch in one of the ships. The powerful light picked out the figure of a giant caveman, a slender, softly rounded body in a green tunic across his shoulder.

As the beam found him, the huge figure whirled and raced with great bounding strides for the valley wall no more than a hundred yards away. The man next to Rhon-Dee growled a single word and leveled his kodet. Before he could press the firing pin, the commander struck aside the weapon.

"Don't shoot, you fool!" he cried. "That's the princess he's holding!"

At his words, the men about him uttered choked cries of rage and, without waiting for orders, two broke away and raced across the open ground in an effort to overtake Ana-Bet's abductor. But the flying figure left them behind as though they were rooted to the ground, and seconds later it had disappeared among the shadows of the overhanging cliffs.

Empty-handed, the two soldiers straggled back, feet dragging despondently. Rhon-Dee ground his teeth in rage as the full realization of this night's crowning blow came home to him.

"It is useless to try to find her before morning," he told the others dully. "Now we must win back our

ships. But spare the lives of a few of these savages; we will force them to lead us to the one who has stolen Ana-Bet."

CHAPTER IX

AS VALAR plunged into the shadows at the base of the valley rim, Ana-Bet, princess of Andara, felt her last shred of hope give way, and she resigned herself to only Novah knew what fate. As fascinating to her as this giant caveman was physically, she held no illusions of what being alone and helpless in his hands would mean. Either death would come quickly, or life would become a matter of waiting for an opportunity to do away with herself. . . .

As the sheer valley wall rose before him, Valar never hesitated but swarmed up the rocky escarpment with an easy agility that left Ana-Bet breathless. Once over its rim he plunged ahead without pausing for breath, racing across the ribbon of grass there until he reached the first line of towering trees.

Into their branches he went—up and up until he was well above the cloaking tangle of vines and creepers; then he was moving once more in a horizontal plane, from tree to tree, while the stricken girl clung to him in mingled awe and terror and the glimmerings of reluctant admiration.

Ana-Bet lost all sense of time. It seemed that she was caught up in an insane nightmare filled with ghostly shadows and inky depths and a wild pattern of swaying boughs. Somewhere below was solid ground, but how far below she dared not think. Even her probable fate seemed no longer of importance; it was the *now* that mattered.

One moment her captor was swinging through the trees as though pursued by a thousand demons; and the

next, he had halted abruptly on the high-flung branch of a jungle giant. Not ungently he lowered her to the rough bark near the tree bole and she sank down to a crouching position, holding desperately to the trunk.

Valar's keen eyes made out the taut expression on her face, and he smiled grimly. He wondered at the impulse that had made him keep this girl once his flight from the valley was successful. She had been no more than a hostage, a shield, then. But some impulse, some emotion, had kept him from tossing her aside once freedom was assured.

She was very beautiful he realized for the second time within a few hours. Far more beautiful than any girl of his tribe. Perhaps that was it. It was time he took a mate; all his friends had said that many times. True, this one was hardly a practical choice; she was more helpless than a child and, he could see, knew nothing of life in caves and jungle. If she was really a god, then gods were indeed a sorry lot and it was foolish to fear them. But it seemed likely that these were not gods. Had he not seen many of them torn to death by the savage fury of men like himself?

Yes, she would be his mate. He would like having her as his mate. She was soft and rounded and her hair was like a jungle night filled with the smell of flowers. He would be very gentle with her lest he bruise the white perfection of her; and he would bring the choicest foods for her to eat and teach her the duties of cave women. It was right that the most beautiful girl in all the world should be the mate of the world's mightiest warrior!

HE WATCHED her huddling there, clinging to the tree, and a wave of tenderness swept through him. He put out a hand and touched

her hair gently, marvelling at its silken texture. He let the fingers slide lingeringly down until they brushed gently against her throat.

Slender, sharp-tipped fingers lashed out and slashed him violently across his cheek. The nails bit deep, almost plunging the cave man into the black depths below.

So this was how she returned his caress! Voicing a low growl, he caught her by the shoulder as she made a pathetic attempt to scramble away. Roughly he dragged her close, but the hand raised to cuff her into submission never fell.

Instead, Valar swept the startled girl tight against his naked chest and covered her lips with kisses!

For a moment, the princess fought back with a silent intensity born of outraged dignity and fear. But only for a moment. Then her arms came up and closed lingeringly about his neck as with closed eyes she responded to the demands of those burning lips....

And then Ana-Bet, princess of Andara, tore herself from the wild man's arms and buried her shame-flushed face in her hands.

What was happening to her? she thought dazedly. Never before had she kissed any man—not even Had-Sudol—in the way that she had this—this savage! She could feel the pounding of her heart—and she knew it was not the pounding of fear but that of another emotion far, far different.

As for Valar—he was no less confused. The ways of a woman were strange to him—and becoming steadily stranger. Seconds ago she had made his senses reel with the ardency of her response to his kisses; now she was as though a world removed.

Hesitantly he reached out to touch her arm, only to have her jerk away as though he was Cretah, the hyena.

"No!" The tone of utter loathing in her voice was for herself far more than for him, but the man could not know that. "No! Don't touch me!"

"I want to touch you," he said simply. "You are mine. You shall come with me to the caves of Polex and we will be together always."

Ana-Bet's head came up furiously. "You—you animal! I hate you! Take me back where you found me, or Rhon-Dee and his men will hunt you down and kill you like the beast you are!"

A VAGRANT ray of Mua, the moon, filtered through the foliage overhead, picking out the calm dignity in the cave man's handsome face, and the girl was stricken into shamed silence. Impulsively she laid a hand softly on one of his bronzed forearms.

"I didn't mean that, Valar," she whispered. "But I—I can't stay with you. Take me back."

For a long time the man stared at her without speaking, his face empty of expression. Then he shook his head, almost violently.

"No. When Oru comes again, I will take you to the caves of my people. You are mine—and what is mine I keep."

Rising, he picked her up with unexpected gentleness and placed her in a sitting position within a fork of a wide branch. "It is time we slept," he said. "In the morning I will take you to the tribe of Polex."

Before she could voice a protest, he left her—swinging to a branch directly over, where he was hidden among the leaves. The bough swayed gently for a moment, then was still; and though twice she called out to him, there was no response.

Her relief at being free, even temporarily, of Valar's disturbing presence was tempered by an unreasoning

pique that he could so calmly leave her at all. She thought of descending to the ground while the cave man slept and finding her way back to the encampment. But in what direction the valley lay was by now pure guesswork; and when, a little later, a lion roared somewhere below she gave up the idea hurriedly.

The chill of a jungle night began to make itself felt. She knew she would never be able to sleep here, cramped and cold and forced to cling to a swaying branch.

Even as the thought came, her head had begun to nod. Seconds later she was sound asleep.

CHAPTER X

HARDLY had the first flush of dawn stained the eastern horizon than the Andaran encampment boiled with activity. Graves were dug to receive those honored dead who had come millions of miles across space to find a final resting place. The bodies of Ulgo's defeated horde were dragged out and burned in the valley's center, lest the corpses attract the jungle beasts and endanger the living.

But it was near the flagship that activity was heaviest. A hundred heavily armed fighting men, the pick of Andara's forces, began to form a double line while awaiting the order to march forth in search of the missing princess. Their faces were grim and intent, their voices silent, their actions purposeful. Ana-Bet, for all her imperious manner and quick tongue, was the darling of her country's warriors and there were few among them who would not have willingly given his life for her safe return.

Now came the lean and muscular Rhon-Dee, commander of the fleet, his striking, hawk-like face set in bleak

lines. With him, between two guards, was the only captive taken during the night's battle: a hulking sullen-faced caveman, arms bound, a lead-rope about his thick neck.

After a brief word to the men, Rhon-Dee moved to the column's head, accompanied by the caveman and his guards. The order to march was given and the twin line moved briskly across the valley to the cliff-side. Up the face of living rock went the hundred warriors, making hard work of it, for the ascent would have taxed the abilities of a mountain goat. When all were assembled at the upper edge, the captive managed to pick up Valar's spoor among the grasses, and the column followed him to the jungle's edge.

Here, at the base of a towering tree, their guide stopped and scratched his head in obvious helplessness. By signs he managed to convey that the quarry had taken to the trees at this point—a route he was unable to follow. Judging from his gestures, a cave man who used the highway usually reserved for little Tola, the monkey, was something new in his experience and he seemed more than slightly impressed.

After consulting with his lieutenants, Rhon-Dee decided to lead his men along a game trail nearby that followed a wavering course into the jungle. It was entirely possible they would be led in an altogether different direction by doing so, but there seemed no alternative.

A few minutes later the last of the rescue party disappeared into the gloomy sea of plant life.

* * *

ORU, THE SUN, was half above the horizon to the east when Ana-Bet opened her eyes. For a moment she could not recall where she was; then remembrance of last night's events flooded back and she rose

shakily to her feet on the wide branch.

A soft sound behind her brought the girl around quickly. Standing there, a quizzical smile bending his firm lips, was Valar, his arms filled with succulent fruits.

They ate in silence for a while before Ana-Bet looked up and surprised him staring at her. "Take me back to my people, Valar," she said. "I do not...love you. I could never love any man who took me by force."

He shrugged and his fine eyes were shadowed with sadness. "No," he said tonelessly. "You belong to me."

"Would you want a girl who hates you?"

"Your words say you hate me," he replied. "But when your lips are against mine, they say something else."

Two angry spots of color burned in her cheeks. "I was frightened. I didn't know— It meant nothing. Can't you understand that it...meant nothing?"

Instead of replying, Valar tossed aside the rind of the fruit he had been gnawing and rose to his feet. "Oru is well into the sky," he said. "We must reach the caves before the day grows too hot for travel."

The girl did not move. "Then you will not take me back?"

She might as well not have spoken. He extended his hand to help her rise and said, "Come."

Instead of traveling through the trees as on the night before, Valar carried her down through the branches until he paused directly above a narrow game trail. After making sure no danger lurked in the immediate vicinity, the caveman dropped lightly to the dusty path and lowered his burden to her feet. "Let us walk for a while," he said.

Ana-Bet glanced nervously at the tangled walls of foliage on either side

of the trail. "What if we meet one of the horrible beasts Rhon-Dee says are to be found on 'this world?'"

One corner of Valar's mouth quirked and he patted the knife at his waist. "Soon you will learn that your mate is the greatest fighter in all the world. With no more than a knife I have slain Kraga, the lion! No other man has done that. No other man can travel through the trees as I do; no other man can find game by means of his nose alone. I am the greatest hunter, the mightiest fighter who ever lived!"

"You are also," the princess said acidly, "the greatest boaster who ever will live!"

But she caught herself smiling as she said it. How like a little boy this wild man was! Perhaps all primitive people were given to swaggering and boasting, she thought, and I shall have to get used to it!

For the better part of an hour they moved along the path, Valar holding back his swinging, springy gait to keep from leaving the girl behind. Most of the way he walked ahead, eyes and nose alert, his right hand never far from the knife at his belt.

SUDDENLY Valar froze to a halt almost in mid-stride, his head lifted alertly and the thin line of his nostrils quivered. To Ana-Bet it was almost as though his ears twitched forward like those of an animal, and although she strained her ears to the utmost she could hear nothing beyond the already familiar rustle of foliage and hum of insects which made up the customary jungle background.

Valar made a vague sound deep in his throat. Taking the wondering girl by an arm, he left the trail and slipped behind a curtain of vines and leaves. Ana-Bet was on the point of demanding an explanation but he clapped a palm across her lips and

shook his head in warning.

They had not long to wait. The princess caught a murmur of voices first, followed by the sound of feet against bare earth. And then she saw what at first she thought were two cave people: a lovely girl in the barely adequate pelt of some animal, and a man wearing a loin cloth of the same material. They drew nearer, until she could almost reach out and touch them.

It was then that Ana-Bet, princess of far-off Andara, forgot all caution in the thrill of amazed recognition.

"*Had-Sudol!*" she screamed; and before even Valar's lightning-like reflexes could act, she was through the curtain of foliage and had thrown herself into the arms of the tall figure on the trail.

The young nobleman's jaw dropped until it almost unhinged as he recognized the girl. "B-Bet!" he stammered. "What in Novah's name are—"

He broke off in alarm as a second figure crashed into the open, and he saw the rage-distorted features of a magnificent caveman bearing down upon him. He pushed aside the princess and threw one arm up in a futile attempt at defense. A soundless flash of pain seemed to split his head into flaming bits, the ground spun up to meet him and the blackness of unconsciousness poured into his brain.

Valar, deep in the throes of jealousy, leaped forward to finish the kill. But as quickly as he moved, another was even quicker.

Something that seemed all blonde hair, fury and fingernails exploded full in his face, forcing him to back away a step or risk losing an eye. Duleen, untamed daughter of a savage chief, had come to the aid of the man she loved.

Like a man annoyed by an overzealous mosquito, Valar snaked out an arm, caught the raging, spitting girl

about the waist and casually threw her, twisting and turning in mid-air, into a tangle of bushes thirty feet away. She made a convulsive effort to rise, but the breath was gone from her lungs and she sank back gasping for air.

Again the caveman reached for his victim—and again he was interrupted. Between him and the senseless nobleman of Andara stood Ana-Bet, straight as an arrow, her dark eyes flashing.

"Let him alone!" she cried. "Haven't you hurt him enough?"

But Valar, the memory of the girl he loved in the arms of another still burning in his mind, thrust her roughly aside. As those steel fingers closed on Had-Sudol's throat, Ana-Bet made one last effort to save his life.

"Wait, Valar!" she pleaded. "Leave him unharmed and I will be your mate!"

THE CAVEMAN'S grip slackened and he turned his head to stare up at her, puzzled and suspicious. "You belong to me now," he growled. "I have told you that you are to be my mate."

"I will be no man's mate unless I want to be," she said, almost whispering. "Yes, you can take me coldly and against my will. But if you do, I will kill you someday. There will come a time when you must sleep, when you cannot watch me. Then I will kill you—with a knife, with a rock, perhaps with a push as you stand near the edge of a cliff. But someday my chance will come!"

Valar's keen mind digested the words and a faint smile of respect and admiration for this proud woman brushed his lips. Not for a moment did he question that she would do exactly as she said.

"And if I do not kill him?"

Her face crimsoned but her gaze

never wavered. "Then I will... belong to you in the way you want me to."

The caveman's eyes flickered from her to the man on the ground and back to her again. "Why are you ready to do this for him?" he growled. "What is he to you?"

"He is from my world, Valar," she said. "He came here long ago—and when he did not return we came in the ships you saw to hunt for him."

"What is he to you?" the cave lord repeated.

"Does that matter—now?"

The fingers left the unconscious man's throat and Valar stood erect. "For what you promise, I will not kill him." He held out a hand to her. "Come."

Without hesitation, head proudly lifted and shoulders squared, Ana-Bet went to him. Valar swung her easily into his arms, then turned and vaulted into the overhanging branches of a nearby tree....

CHAPTER XI

ONCE SHE regained her breath and the mists of pain lifted, Duleen was able to stagger weakly to her feet.

Except for the limp body of Had-Sudol the trail was empty.

Fearfully she knelt in the dust beside the young Andaran. Blood from one nostril had stained the angle of his jaw and his cheeks seemed pale and drawn. But his bronzed chest rose and fell under even breathing and Duleen's heart swelled with relief and thanksgiving.

She sat there for what appeared to be hours, cradling his head in her arms, until finally his eyes opened slowly and he stared blankly up at her.

"Duleen," he muttered. "What—?"

And then he remembered and his eyes were no longer blank, but cold

with something that was beyond anger. "Where is she?" he said hoarsely. "What has he done to her?"

Roughly, without waiting for an answer, he pushed away her arms and tried to rise. But not until the third attempt, with Duleen's help, was he successful. He swayed there in the path, his eyes searching and a little wild. "Where is she?" he said again.

It was then that something seemed to die inside the cave girl. "He took her," she said dully. "I saw him take her in his arms and leap into a tree."

Had-Sudol weaved unsteadily to the tree she indicated and peered upward through the mazes of foliage there. "He's gone," he said, turning to her. "Who is he? Where would he take her?"

"I never saw him before," the girl said. "I cannot say where he took her. Unless..."

His hands bit into her shoulders. "Unless what?"

She made no attempt to shake off his grasp. "I have heard it said that another tribe has its caves in that direction." She pointed toward the north. "They do not come into the hunting grounds of my father's people, nor do we go to theirs."

"You think he is from that tribe?"

"It could be so."

Had-Sudol's hands fell from her shoulders and he bit his lips, thinking. "This trail forked back there away," he said presently. "Remember? The other branch led in the direction you say this tribe has its caves. I'm going to try it!"

She was watching him through eyes that had narrowed slightly. "Why must you do that?" she asked.

His frown said that the question was ridiculous. "You don't think I'd leave her in the hands of that—that *buliff*, do you?"

Duleen had no idea what a *buliff* was, but his tone told her that to him

there was nothing more despicable. "She means so much to you?"

It was more statement than question. But Had-Sudol, in his impatience to be gone, was no longer listening. It was in his silence that Duleen read her answer—and believed it to be the true one. She did not know—she could not know!—that the man's determination to rescue the princess Ana-Bet was not motivated by love—at least not the love a man holds for the one woman of his choice. To Had-Sudol, Ana-Bet was a symbol: the synthesis of the land of his fathers and *their* fathers for countless generations, of the country he loved. Like any soldier, he would die for Ana-Bet; for Ana-Bet *was* Andara.

He pointed ahead along the trail. "Try to find the valley where my people are. They will look after you until I return."

He turned and started back. Duleen called out, "Wait! I am going with you!"

He shook his head impatiently. "What good would that do? I'd only have to look after you, too."

"You do not know the ways of the cave people as I do," she told him. "You will need all the cunning of both of us to take your woman away from an entire tribe."

It made sense, Had-Sudol was forced to admit. And come to think of it, this girl could probably do a much better job of taking care of herself than he could—at least as far as life in this savage world was concerned.

"All right," he said. "Come on, then."

BY THE time Had-Sudol and Duleen reached the vicinity of the caves of Pollex, nightfall was hardly more than an hour away. Cautiously they crouched down behind a curtain of foliage high among the branches

of a forest giant and peered out at the scene below.

It was but little different from what both of them had seen many times before while with Ulgo's people. What might have been the same naked children, darted at play among the toiling women and lolling warriors. At the spring a knot of the women were filling cooking pots for the evening meal, and in the sunniest spot to be found, the old men of the tribe warmed their aged bones and spoke presumably wise words to one another.

Had-Sudol was in a fever of impatience. For hours he had been forced to lay up through the heat of mid-day instead of pushing on to his goal. But Duleen, far more familiar with the laws of jungle survival, would not permit it. She had pointed out that nothing could be done toward rescuing the princess during the light of day; that any attempt to do so was almost hopeless at best without their being completely exhausted before they even started. Only the very strong or the very foolish went running about during the terrible enervating heat of mid-day, and she had been adamant that they avoid doing so.

Had-Sudol's eyes ceased to dart about the clearing below and disappointment clouded his features. "I don't see her," he said.

Duleen's heart contracted painfully at the panic in his tone. How he must love this black-haired girl of his own kind! With an effort she kept the hurt from betraying itself as he spoke.

"She is there. In one of the caves, probably."

Relief and doubt struggled in his expression. "How can you tell?" he said eagerly.

"Look," she replied, pointing. "There—just within the clearing's edge, to the right of the cliff. That warrior who talks to the man with the skin of Kraga, the lion, about his

hips."

Had-Sudol's eyes followed her directions and he stiffened. "It's her! The one who took her!"

"Even had I not seen him," Duleen said calmly, "I would know they are here. Watch the women at the spring. See how they talk and laugh excitedly among themselves while they glance often at the caves. It is the way of women when they speak of a warrior and his new mate."

"He shall never have her!" Had-Sudol said grimly, so low that Duleen barely made out the words. For an instant it seemed to the girl that he was on the point of leaping from the branch to charge the entire tribe, and she placed a quieting hand on his tense arm.

"How can we learn in which cave she's held?" he said.

Duleen considered the question thoughtfully. "We must watch to see which cave he enters," she said finally. "There is a chance that she will come out to eat with him beside the cooking fires when Oru is gone from the sky. But it is not likely she will want to so soon."

THE MAN caught the meaning in those last words and his fingers clenched helplessly. "What can I do?" he burst out. "What can I do?"

"Nothing—now. Nothing but wait until the tribe sleeps—"

A horrible thought flashed through the young nobleman's brain. "But by then it may be too late! He may have—may have—"

He broke off, flushing, hating even to put the thought into words, to find the girl staring at him with puzzled eyes.

"Too late?" she repeated. "He would not bring her so far only to kill her."

Had-Sudol did not enlarge on the subject. Despite the three years he

had spent among the cave people, he knew next to nothing of either their mores or their morals. But he did know that the princess Ana-Bet was in the hands of a wild savage who could not fail to be aroused by her loveliness of face and form.

Dusk began to deepen in the clearing, and Had-Sudol suffered the tortures of the damned waiting for Ana-Bet's captor to give some indication of which of the caves was his. Another warrior had joined the first two by now and some sort of heated discussion seemed to be going on. This third warrior had only just arrived from the jungle and immediately sought out the chief.

Finally, when the light was so dim that the Andaran was barely able to distinguish his man, the brawny cave lord turned, crossed the clearing with springy steps and entered one of the dark openings in the lower tier of caves dotting the cliffside.

He was out again, almost at once, carrying a heavy spear. About his shoulders were the coils of a grass rope, a quiver of arrows and bow of black wood. Standing there, shoulders squared and head thrown back, the gray cliff rising above him, he might have been some dusky-skinned forest god from the dawn of Time.

He raised his voice in a kind of chanting shout that carried clearly to the couple in the tree. In response, warriors began to cluster around him while women hurried into the caves, then reappeared with weapons which they handed to their men.

Duleen explained what was taking place. "A returning hunter caught sight of some sort of game—just what I don't know. A hunting party is forming to go after it, and the chances are fair that they may not return until late. You are lucky indeed, Had-Sudol; for the fewer warriors there are about, the greater your chances of

freeing your woman."

He was on the point of explaining that Ana-Bet was not "his woman," when a fresh burst of activity interrupted him. The hunting party was complete now—over thirty strong—and amidst a hubbub of excitement from women and children, it set out across the circle of open ground for the game trail entrance into the jungle.

Moments after the men disappeared from view, the utter darkness of night plunged the clearing into blackness, and soon cooking fires began to dot the scene. The remainder of the tribe of Polax gathered about the flames and the feasting began.

Had-Sudol was suddenly aware of Duleen's hand on his arm. He looked around and was barely able to make out the white oval of her face near his own.

"They will stay about the fires for hours," she said tautly. "It is the custom when hunters go out so late. The caves will be deserted now—unwatched; the girl, alone."

Had-Sudol's pulses leaped. "Of course! Later, when the tribe sleeps, the guards would be a problem." He rose to his feet on the branch. "Wait for me here, Duleen. When I have freed the princess I will come back for you."

"May the gods watch over you," she said quietly, and for a second Had-Sudol thought he heard a sob behind the words.

UPON REACHING the base of the tree, Had-Sudol began a slow circling at the outer edge of the clearing, working his way toward the point where the encroaching forest and jungle met the cliffside a hundred yards or so below the caves of Polax. He kept within the fringes of vegetation, moving with all the stealth at his command, for he had no idea whether

or not guards were stationed at the periphery of open ground in anticipation of just some such enemy patrol action.

But for a long time no foe had attacked these cave people and safeguards had been gradually relaxed. So it was that the young Andaran, totally inexperienced though he was in this type of campaign, found it comparatively easy to reach the juncture of cliff and jungle hardly more than a stone's throw from the cave entrances.

By the flickering light of cooking fires he counted off those gaping shadowy holes nearest the escarpment's base. The fifth from this end—that was it! Or was it the sixth? Somehow from this new perspective things looked totally different. For one thing the first row of caves was higher from the ground than he had imagined. Fifteen feet—perhaps even more—would have to be scaled before he could reach Ana-Bet.

Carefully he planned each move he must make, each step he must take along the way, trying to anticipate every danger that could possibly arise. For him to cross those hundred yards by stealth would be sheer suicide. Boldness must be the keystone of his plan. He was sharply aware that he was completely unarmed. What wouldn't he have given for just one small kodet! Even a stone knife such as these wild men used would have been welcome.

The realization came that he must delay no longer. And so, calling silently to his god for protection, Had-Sudol stepped leisurely into the open and began to stroll casually along the edge of the towering cliff toward the first line of caves.

The first few strides were easy enough; but a feeling of suspense and strain began to rise in him from that moment on. It seemed that he was moving through an area of light a

hundred times more brilliant than could be created by a score of powerful spotlights. Surely every hair on his body would be perfectly visible to the cave people about the fires. His skin seemed to crawl under the impact of innumerable eyes. A shiver ran along his legs and shook his knees until he was ready to swear they were pounding together like beaten gongs.

With an attempt at casualness that required superhuman effort, he swung his eyes to the nearest group of humans...and felt his senses reel. Although his judgment shouted that they were fully sixty feet away, he could have sworn that an outstretched hand from any one of them could have grabbed his shoulder.

Doggedly he plodded on, heart pounding as though trying to leap from his chest. The first fire was behind him, now the second, now the third—

A BULKY caveman, the half-gnawed rib of Tao, the deer, protruding from his gnarled fist, turned away from the third fire and stared straight at Had-Sudol. He took a step or two toward the young nobleman and called out something to him, waving the bone for emphasis.

Up and down Had-Sudol's legs continued, knees flexing and straightening, body pulled forward by reflex action alone. Even fear was gone from him now; there was only a numbness imparted by a mind which refused to endure further the awful suspense.

The man at the fire hesitated, shrugged slightly and turned back to the fire...and to Had-Sudol's ears his own sigh of relief was as loud as a raging hurricane.

The fourth fire drifted past not more than fifty feet to his left, then the fifth—and he was standing directly below the cave he had decided earlier housed the captive Ana-Bet. He slowed to a halt even as his eyes were

darting across the fifteen feet of rock between the ground and the hole in the cliff. He made out the outcroppings of living rock that made up the necessary hand—and foot-holds used to reach the caves. It would be fairly simple for any reasonably agile person to make use of them.

At this point his danger, no matter how great before, must become even greater. Should he be seen entering the cave of a warrior who the entire tribe knew was away, suspicion would become outright alarm and they would be down on his head like a swarm of insects.

Up the side of the cliff went Had-Sudol, his movements sure and swift as if he had spent a lifetime doing nothing else. At any moment he expected to hear a yell of alarm from behind him, followed by the thunder of running feet. But neither happened and he passed into the Cimmerian depths of the cave.

After a few steps—only just enough to be sure he was out of sight from the clearing—he stopped and flattened himself against one of the side walls. His labored breathing eased and he strained his ears to listen, seeking to shut out the babble of voices from outside.

At first he could hear nothing else; then, so faintly he could not be sure, he caught the sounds of soft breathing in the blackness beyond.

The hairs lifted along Had-Sudol's neck. Stealthily he began to move toward the sound, careful to avoid striking any loose object that might betray him.

The sound of breathing was more audible now, and suddenly his bare toes scraped lightly against the soft warmth of human skin.

Had-Sudol froze, expecting to hear a shout of alarm, a scream of fear—anything. But the slow even sound went on and his nerves ceased their

twitching.

With all the care of a man fondling a bubble, the young Andaran extended a hand toward the sleeper. In this pit of blackness his eyes were useless; he must get his information through the sense of touch alone.

Warm breath moved against his fingers and he was acutely aware of the animal heat of the invisible body inches from where he now crouched. His hand drifted on, then settled like a drifting leaf...and encountered the soft fragrant profusion of a woman's hair.

Was it Ana-Bet's hair or that of some cave woman? The answer could mean the difference between life and death for him. All speculation was useless, even dangerous; he must act—and act now!

ALMOST BRUTALLY he clapped the palm of one hand across the sleeping woman's mouth; and as she awoke and strained upward against his hold, he whispered frantically in an unseen ear: "Bet! It is I—Had-Sudol! For the love of Novah, don't move! Don't make a sound!"

The straining body relaxed and fell back so abruptly that he feared the girl had fainted. Still not entirely sure that she was Ana-Bet, he lifted his muffling hand slightly, ready to slap it back against the girl's lips should she attempt to scream.

Instead of a cry for help, however, he heard words in a breathless whisper: "Had-Sudol! How—Where—"

"Shhhh!" he hissed. "We're getting out of here—I hope! But you've got to listen closely and do exactly as I tell you. One slip, one little move that's out of place, and we're both lost!"

Now fully awake, Ana-Bet found her mind churning with tangled emotions. To escape, to return to her own people—the thought was intoxicating!

Yet with it came, unbidden, the memory of Valar holding her in his arms and smiling down at her back there in the jungle. His face, handsome and proud and intelligent, seemed to form before her, and it was almost as though she could feel the warmth of his muscular body close to her own....

Had-Sudol was urging her to her feet. "They're at the fires," he was saying, his voice so low she was barely able to make out the words. "I'll go first, but you must stay very close. When we reach the ground, we'll stroll together along the side of the cliff, like two young lovers who want to be alone. If anyone calls to us, we'll be much too interested in each other to hear. Can you do this, Bet? Can you act that way when your legs are trying to run and you dare not let them?"

"I—I think so," she breathed. "But—but—"

Something in her voice—a doubt, a reluctance—snagged his breathing with sudden horror. "I wasn't too late, my princess! He didn't—he didn't dare to—to—"

For a moment she had no idea what he was trying to say. Then understanding brought an invisible color to her cheeks and she choked down what threatened to be a gale of almost hysterical laughter.

"No, Had-Sudol," she said gravely. "It is not too late." And she wondered if the unseemly note of regret in her voice was audible.

At the cave's entrance, Had-Sudol paused and glanced searchingly about the clearing. There was no change; the fires burned brightly and the cave people were still around them, eating, talking and laughing.

The young nobleman, his heart trying to push his tongue aside, lowered himself over the narrow ledge and began the short descent. The princess

followed close behind him and a moment later they were standing together on level ground.

Side by side, arms about each other's waists as befitted young lovers, they began to walk slowly toward the distant jungle. To them both the wall of trees appeared miles away and seemed to recede in spite of their efforts to cut down the gap of open ground.

AS THEY moved on, Had-Sudol kept up a running barrage of whispered words of encouragement, seeking to lessen the girl's nervousness. But Ana-Bet needed no such help; she was aware of no fear or strain.

Not until they were nearly two thirds of the way to safety did their bubble of hope burst—and it did so with a suddenness that left them both momentarily paralyzed, unable to move.

A shout of anger and alarm burst simultaneously from the throats of several men about the nearest fire, and five warriors, spears lifted threateningly, came racing toward them. And in that instant of paralysis Had-Sudol realized what had betrayed them.

The princess Ana-Bet was wearing a tunic instead of the length of animal skin common among the cave people!

A wave of anger at his own stupidity shook Had-Sudol, but it was too late now for self-condemnation.

"Run!" he shouted, and seizing the girl by one arm, plunged for the now nearby jungle with all the speed he could muster.

The distance to safety narrowed swiftly, but far swifter came the enraged pursuers. The thud of racing feet grew loud—louder—until it beat in the ears of the Andarans...and the haven of growing things was still yards away.

All hope left Had-Sudol as he realized the distance was too great. Only one thing could save the princess—and the princess alone!

With a savage thrust of his arm he literally threw the girl toward the spur of jungle, then wheeled abruptly and, with nothing but his clenched fists, faced the warriors of Poley.

So unexpected was the maneuver, so completely without fear this lone man's bearing, that the first line of cavemen skidded to an involuntary halt. But only for a moment. Spear arms flashed back ready to hurl flint-tipped death at this madman who dared face overwhelming odds...and then the lone warrior was alone no longer!

From the depths of the jungle sprang a second figure which crossed the distance between with flashing strides and hurled itself upon the enemy. A short heavy branch in the form of a bludgeon rose and fell in swift blows that sent two of them senseless to the ground.

But there could be only one outcome—and it came at once. Three flint-tipped lengths of wood licked out and tore into living flesh and the slender figure sank silently to earth.

"*Duleen!*" The word burst from the lungs of Had-Sudol in a sobbing scream, and he threw himself upon the enemy, fists swinging with the blind fury of utter madness.

To Ana-Bet, princess of Andara, watching with horrified eyes from the forest edge, it seemed almost as if the young nobleman opened his arms to welcome Death's embrace. Cold flint tore into him and he fell as a great tree falls, full across the lifeless body of the girl he loved—the girl who preferred death to a life without him.

Lit by the blood-red fires, filled with shifting shadows under the wavering flames, the scene burned itself forever in the mind of Andara's

princess. Then blindly she turned away and ran, sobbing and shivering uncontrollably, toward the game trail.

CHAPTER XII

HOW LONG she raced along that dusty ribbon, panting and weeping, Ana-Bet never knew. Time and again she stumbled and fell, only to rise again and stagger on through the blackness of the jungle night. Her tunic ripped and tore under the raking bite of thorn-studded vines and bushes, her hair was tangled and filled with bits of vegetation, her legs bled from a score of scratches crisscrossing her soft skin.

Finally she could go no further and heedless of the possible danger from prowling meat-eaters, she sank to the ground and lay there waiting for her heart to cease its mad pounding or stop altogether—she cared not which.

And it was there, huddled in a pitiful heap, that Rhon-Dee and his column of Andaran fighting men found her. Tenderly she was lifted up and borne back through the jungle to the valley where lay the ships of Andara. Men skilled in the arts of healing bathed away the evidence of her ordeal, bound up her wounds and placed her between cool sheets. And not once during all this did Ana-Bet's eyes open, and not once did she realize what was taking place....

IT WAS mid-afternoon. In the cabin of the flagship the princess Ana-Bet sat in a comfortable chair staring out listlessly at the valley wall and the heavy growth of trees and bushes masking its base.

For the past several hours preparations for leaving this untamed planet had been under way. Seated at his desk across from the princess, Rhon-Dee had issued a steady stream of orders to officers, crew members and

soldiers. All equipment was now back on board and hatches were being tightened.

The muted roar of engines was beginning to fill the valley outside with a sound like distant thunder. Rhon-Dee finished computations on a huge chart spread across his desk and leaned back rolling the stylus between fingers that, as he stared at the lovely sad-faced girl in the chair, were none too steady.

"We wait," he said formally, "only Her Highness' command."

She did not even turn her eyes to look at him. "Give the order, Dee," she said tonelessly. "Let us get off this accursed world and never come back. All of it is not worth even one of the lives it has taken from us."

"At once," the man said, and reached for the small lever that would permit his order to take off to reach the captains in charge of the other ships.

Before he reached it, however, Ana-Bet's voice, suddenly alive with excitement and some other emotion he could not immediately classify, stopped his hand.

"Wait, Rhon-Dee! There is something—someone... He has come back!"

The commander left his chair hurriedly and joined her in front of the port hole. He saw the tall, broad-shouldered figure of the caveman whom he had last seen bearing the princess into the jungle. He was standing in the open only a few feet from the base of a leafy tree, naked except for the loin cloth at his hips, his leonine head lifted with all the unconscious dignity of a lion. An idle breeze stirred the long thick hair on his head and the bright sun picked out the smooth swell of muscles beneath bronzed skin.

"Open a hatch, Dee," the girl said in a voice that was none too steady.

"Open a—?" Rhon-Dee's jaw dropped. "In Novah's name, *why?* Surely you're not going to let that—that *freak* come aboard?"

"And why not?" she blazed, facing him angrily. "I can induce him to come with us to Andara." Her voice softened abruptly. "You see, Rhon-Dee, he loves me—and I love him!"

The commander straightened as though she had struck him. "Are you mad? Love that—that— I would sooner see you dead!"

Her chin lifted imperiously and her eyes were cold. "You will do as I say or find yourself in irons within minutes!"

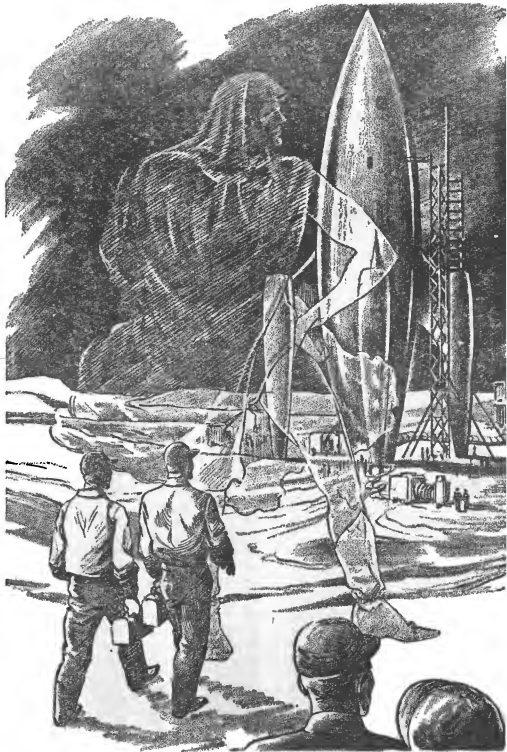
Rhon-Dee's eyes veiled and he took a deep unsteady breath. "As Her Highness commands," he said thickly and slid a finger beneath the edge of his desk. There was the sound of grinding gears and a section of the cabin wall swung slowly open.

Without a backward glance Ana-Bet was through it and dropped lightly to the long grass of the valley floor. On winged feet she raced across the open ground toward the lone figure near the towering cliff and her heart raced in tempo with her steps.

Suddenly the muffled beat of engines behind her changed to a whining scream, and she whirled about just in time to see the great space ships lift, one after another, into the clear air. A scream of fear rose to her lips as she realized that she was being marooned here on this untamed planet. This, then, was Rhon-Dee's answer to her rejection of his unvoiced love for her. Other eyes would have seen her running from the flagship seconds before the expedition's scheduled departure; and when he told them that she had decided to remain behind because of her love for a caveman, they would believe him.

With sinking heart she watched the

(Concluded On Page 149)



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THEY WON'T BELIEVE ME

By Graham Doar

"Don't fire that rocket!" Lan pleaded. But Earthmen fought him as a traitor — and found that treason has twin edges!

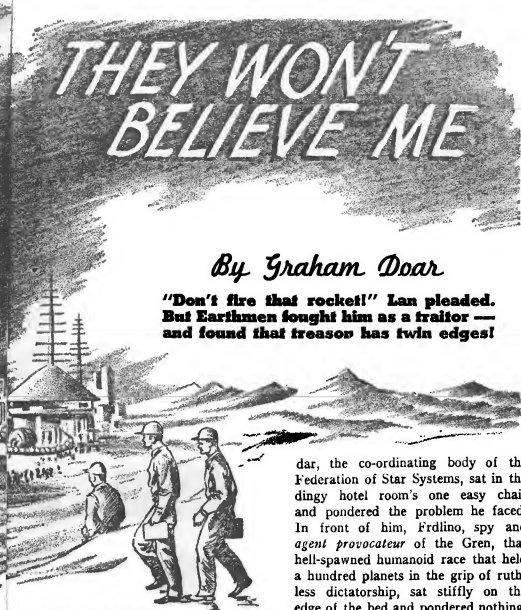
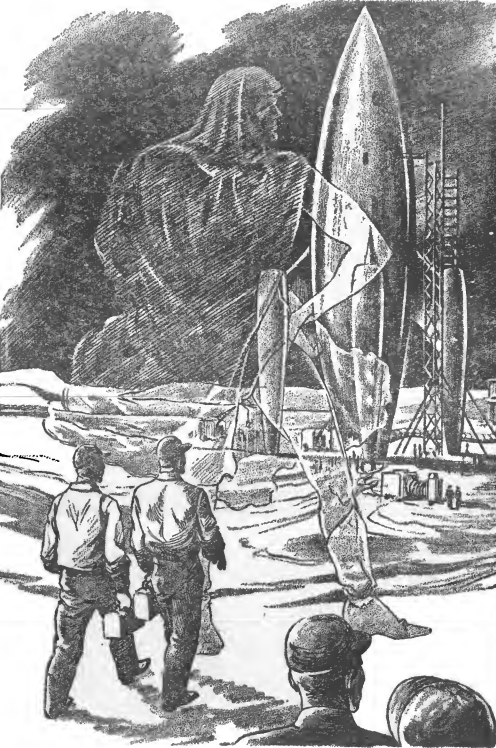
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Lan said, "You're right, of course. I shall have to kill you. It was you, I suppose, who developed the alloy

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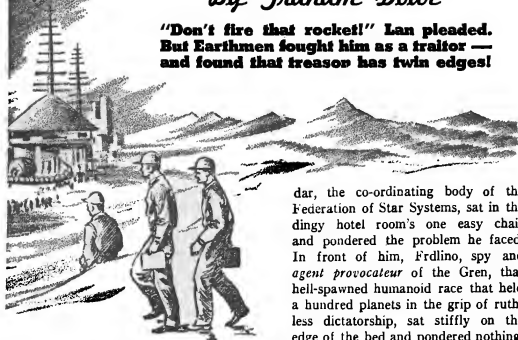


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they needed?"

The big blond head nodded sluggishly.

"Hoping," Lan said bitterly, "to enlist Earth in the war against the Federation, no doubt. You Gren are stupid, Frdlino. Even that bigoted imbecile who rules you should know that if he crowds us too far, the Council must strike."

Frldino spoke dully. "Gren of the Gren is Lord of Space. Mandar must perish that destiny be served."

"Pah! You sound like one of the Eastern Earthmen. Destiny *will* be served, Frdlino—and so will Gren. Never doubt it. Space will be free, one day—travelled by free men, unarmed and unafraid. That is my promise to you, Frdlino. Now enough!"

The big blond man stiffened slightly, then slid slowly from the bed to the floor. Frdlino of the Gren was dead.

FOR TWO weeks now, huge tarpaulin-covered trucks had ground over the high pass to the east of Los Perditos and whined in low gear down the winding road. All night they roared through the sleepy little town and out into the desert, each cab occupied by a tired-eyed driver hunched over the jerking wheel and, beside him, an alert, silent figure that cradled a sub-machine gun in its arms.

There were strangers in Los Perditos, uranium prospectors they claimed, and openly showed the neat plastic boxes and the earphones. But, for working prospectors, they had a great deal of time on their hands and they listened more to the talk around the tavern, the hotel and the store than to the Geiger counters.

Twenty miles away, under the shadow of the western barrier range, was the focal point of this activity; a point well hidden from neighboring

eyes. Polished on its four-vened tail, vertically aligned on the thick concrete firing table, the Dunston-Link ARX-I, the shiny new and highly secret fission-powered moon rocket, reared its gleaming tapered length one hundred and ten feet into the air. Loaded, locked and ready. The firing table had been set in the center of a natural amphitheatre surrounded by tall craggy walls and not even the needle-like nose of the space rocket was visible a few miles away. Within that area, hard-eyed men in helmet liners and the Army's summer khaki strolled about, handling their heavy Tommy guns with nervous but expert hands.

Operation Lunatic was the name the humorless military had assigned to this first attempt by man to break the ancient apron strings binding him to Mother Earth.

And it was D-day at Zero.

CAPTAIN Rodney MacLeod of the Army Counter-Intelligence Corps, wore a dusty Stetson pushed to the back of his blond head, faded levis and a cotton plaid shirt. He patted his various pockets and spoke around the cigarette dangling from his mouth. "Got a match, Mike?"

The bartender took a crumpled paper packet from beside the cash register and struck one. MacLeod leaned toward him. The lips of neither man moved.

"Anything new, Mike?"

"Nothing much. You're to call in."

"Been long?"

"Hour, maybe."

MacLeod blew smoke at the ceiling and took a long drink of his beer. He said, "Thanks, Mike." The bartender polished glasses. The man in a rumpled business suit who'd been sitting alone at the other end of the bar drifted toward them.

"You from out at the area, Jack?"

The captain looked at him. "What area, mister?"

"Oh, all right. Forget it. I just—" Under MacLeod's pale stare his voice died and he shifted uncomfortably.

The captain drained his glass and said, "See you around, Mike." He left the tavern and crossed the street to the hotel and the only telephone in Los Perditos.

The stranger nodded at his lean figure as he went out. He said to the bartender, "Who's the cowboy, Jack?"

"No cowboys around here, bud. A few sheepherders. Like another beer?"

An Army sergeant in uniform stood up from a booth at the back and folded his newspaper under his arm. He touched the stranger's shoulder. "You're quite a talker, mister. Just full of questions. You wanta talk, talk to me. That's what I'm with you for."

"What the hell, it's a free country."

"Just as long as you've got your pass, it's free. You could lose it awful easy, flapping your mouth."

THE CAPTAIN faced the hotel lobby and held the receiver to cover his lips. He said, "Army One." The phone popped and squawked: "Luna Red. Seven-zero-three. Scramble."

"What's new, Chief?"

"Get out here, MacLeod. I just got through chewing out the entire so-called organization and you're next on the list."

"What's up?"

"We've lost Link."

"Lost him?"

"If you need a diagram, there's no doubt in my mind he's been grabbed."

MacLeod whistled low. "Bitched, bewildered and far from home. A leak! We wait till D-day to spring a

leak in our top plans!"

"Come a-running, Mac."

IN HIS own room in the hotel, Lan stood beside the bed and considered. On the rickety night table was an indirect lamp with a plain columnar base about five inches in circumference. Made of a beautifully turned and polished metal resembling aluminum, the lamp was obviously not a part of the shabby hotel's furnishings. Lan gave the bulb a quarter-turn to the right before lifting the lamp and twisting its pedestal counter-clockwise. There was a click and, gradually swelling, a low hum filled the room. Lan lay down on the bed and waited.

The hum cut off. A metallic voice said, in Mandar, the universal language of the Federation, "Report."

Staring blankly at the ceiling, Lan began to talk. "Operation Lunatic, the name assigned to the test flight of the Dunston-Link fission-powered rocket, has been set for today at 1900 hours. Repeat, today, 1900 hours. This rocket is unmanned, armed with a conventional explosive and a quantity of ground glass to mark its impact area. It is designed to reach a top speed somewhat beyond escape velocity of seven miles per second. The missile will be projected at the moon from the Zero point previously reported. As was suspected, Fredrich Link, co-builder of the ARX-1, turned out to be Frdlino of the Gren. He has been liquidated at some danger to my security. End."

"Very well."

Lan waited.

The voice said, "Make every effort to deflect or destroy the rocket. There is not sufficient time to dismantle and disarm the auto-strike defensive field about our moon station. Even if there were, it would not be wise with a patrol of Grenships known to

be in this galaxy. The Earth rocket must be stopped."

"Sabotage of the rocket may be impossible. I request permission to break security in order to inform Earthmen of their danger."

"Denied. It would mean a war with Earth."

"Request a patrol be detailed to shoot the rocket down in space in case of failure of my mission."

"Denied. There are no ships available in this sector."

"No questions."

"Very well."

The humming began again and Lan got up and turned off the mechanism. He smiled wryly at his reflection in the mirror over the dresser and lifted two fingers to his forehead in salute. The gesture looked strangely like a farewell.

COLONEL PEDERSEN, the captain's "Chief", was in charge of security at zero and he was a bear with a sore head and a sharp tongue. The disappearance of Frédrich Link, the metallurgical wizard, on the eve of D-day could mean only a security leak. The colonel knew what a security leak would mean in terms of "reply-by-indorsement" correspondence with Washington.

Now, the colonel had been informed that the FBI was moving in to take over the search for the missing man. Admitting that they had the personnel for the job while he himself never had more than one man for any *three* jobs, he didn't like it. He hated it. The colonel was very angry.

He made this plain.

Captain MacLeod's ears still tingled slightly as he leaned against the ten-foot thick concrete wall inside the control blockhouse and listened to Doctor Gordon Dunston attempting to explain the working of his monstrous missile to a group of Army,

Navy and Air Force officers and one tired newspaperman. Dunston himself was tired and impatient.

Already it was six o'clock, H-hour minus one, and since Link's vanishing the entire responsibility of checking and re-checking the assembly and fueling had fallen on Dunston. Even with his seasoned crew of technicians, men who had been working with V-2's at White Sands, it was a tremendous burden. He brought his exposition quickly to a close.

"Well, gentlemen, that's about all I can tell you. In just—" he glanced at the clock with the big red second hand "—fifty-eight minutes, I shall close this contact and four seconds later the rocket will be away. Time of flight, if all goes well, is about nine hours so we may expect impact at four in the morning. The rocket will be out of sight by zero plus forty or fifty seconds and, from then on, the radar trackers and telescopes will have what observation is possible. I suggest you station yourselves near one of these posts. Thank you, gentlemen." He slipped out and was gone, almost running, before the inevitable questions could start.

MacLeod grinned at the red-faced frustration of the high military, who hadn't been told much and had understood only a small part of that. He stood at the door, accompanied by a corporal with a Tommy gun, and checked each pass as the officers filed out into the afternoon sunlight. Now in uniform, his face was impassive, his bearing rigidly correct as he answered their irritated questions with, "Sorry, sir. I have no information on that point."

The reporter, coming out last, the captain recognized as the inquisitive stranger of the tavern, but he gave no sign. The man started to speak, thought better of it and flushed slightly. MacLeod watched with amused

eyes as the officers climbed into their sedans and whirled away, leaving the lone, battered jeep for the civilian.

The last of them gone, he turned to the silent corporal. "Hold it here, Murphy. Blue passes only—and nobody goes into the blockhouse except Doctor Dunston or his men. I'm going up to the pit." He started up the trail toward the amphitheatre, nearly a mile from the blockhouse. He walked rapidly, taking care to avoid the rubber-covered cable that snaked along the trail.

It was zero minus fifty minutes.

LAN WAS desperate. Time was running out and his mission had, as yet, presented no point of attack. By the time he had got out to Zero, the big space rocket was all buttoned up, ready for firing. The order had been passed that no one was to approach the firing table except Doctor Dunston and two of the senior technicians who were making last-minute checks of the connections and relays. The men on the Browning automatic rifle up on the hillside that overlooked the "pit" had their orders and would enforce them. With steel-jacketed .30 calibre slugs, if it became necessary.

But time was running out and the body of the dead "Fredrich Link" was certain to be found any time now. There must be—there *had* to be some way to get to the big rocket. All the missile's controls were built into it. It had to be the rocket itself.

CIGARETTE smoke, swirling thickly in the beam of sunlight lancing through the door of Colonel Pedersen's tent, almost hid the rugged features. Cigarette ash littered the table in front of him, the floor under his feet, his clothes. He brushed irritably at one sleeve and muttered hoarsely, "One consolation in this fouled-up job, Smith, is that I don't have to

wear this parade-ground armor very often."

"Y-yessir." Sergeant Smith shifted his feet uncomfortably.

"Got a cigarette?"

"Y-yessir." He extended an open pack and fumbled in his pockets.

"Okay, okay. I've got matches. Smoke yourself if you like, Sergeant."

"Yessir."

"Oh, hell, Smith, relax. I may bite you but if I do, I'll bark first. Lieutenant Wentz should be here in a minute."

"Yessir."

"Goddammit, don't you ever say anything but 'yessir'?"

Smith's lean face twisted in a grin and his pale eyes twinkled. "No, sir. Not to officers, sir. That's how I got to be sergeant."

"Humph. Well, stay with it, son. You got a career in the Army."

Lieutenant Hal Wentz hurried in, throwing a sloppy salute which the colonel returned even more sloppily. "Sorry, sir. I—"

Colonel Pedersen waved a meaty hand. "That can wait, Hal. There's this that can't. J. Edgar's boys have got Link."

"They found him, eh?"

"Found him?" The colonel snorted. "No, they didn't find him. A Mex chambermaid who couldn't read English walked through a 'Do Not Disturb' sign. She found him. Dead as a mackerel. She called the manager, the manager called the sheriff and, about an hour ago, someone woke up and called the FBI."

"Dead! How was he killed, sir?"

"He wasn't. At least—" The colonel rasped a fingernail across one grizzled cheek. "Anyway, they say he wasn't. Brain hemorrhage. Not a mark on him."

"Has he been posted?"

"Not yet. All right, Hal, here's the bite. We've got a description, unmis-

takable, of the man who entered the hotel with Link—and was seen leaving without him. It—well, sit down, son."

"Who was it, Chief?"

The colonel told him.

THE CAPTAIN stood at the rim of the amphitheatre and watched Doctor Gordon Dunston and a lone technician, their figures ant-like under the towering tube of the ARX-1, making a final check of the rocket ship's myriad controls. It was zero minus forty.

If one of them would only look this way. If either Dunston or the tech would only take me into his consciousness. The range is great, it would be difficult but I think.... A closer approach is dangerous, perhaps death, and the end of hope. A-ah-ah!

Dunston, bending to his work, shook his head in a puzzled fashion and passed his hand over his eyes. He felt dizzy. He straightened and looked away toward the rim of the pit, toward the lone figure that stood at the head of the wooden stairway.

MacLeod stood motionless, rigid.

Duncan said, "There's something wrong with the gyro-tilt mechanism, Czolkosz. I'm going to re-set it."

The technician looked up, surprised. "But I just checked it, sir! Tilt to begin at zero plus forty seconds and continue through an arc of ninety degrees. It's perfect."

Dunston repeated woodenly, "I'm going to re-set it. My calculations are off. I must change it."

The tech raised an eyebrow and shrugged his shoulders. It was the old boy's rocket.

Up on the rim, Lieutenant Wentz said, "Captain MacLeod, the colonel wishes to see you in his tent. Immediately."

MacLeod started like a awakened dreamer. He smiled. "What's all this

sudden formality, Hal?" He was conscious of Sergeant Smith, blank-faced, cold-eyed, in the background.

Wentz turned away. "Immediately, Captain. Will you come with us?"

"All right, Czolkosz. Let's get down to the blockhouse." Doctor Dunston spoke crisply. "That's everything."

"Not going to re-set the tilt, sir?"

"Tilt? Re-set? But didn't you just check it?"

Czolkosz was bewildered. "But, sir, you said it was all wrong. You were going to change it. Then you didn't."

"Why—why, so I was! There was—something—I—guess—" His voice sharpened. "Nonsense! I must have had a touch of sun. The tilt's all right. Let's go."

It was zero minus thirty.

COLONEL PEDERSEN listened, coldly, politely, completely unmoved. His seething anger was evident only in the tiny vein that jumped and fluttered in his temple. Lan completed his story.

The colonel said, "Captain MacLeod, I have no idea what you're attempting to prove with this fantastic Superman nonsense. I suppose a nervous breakdown would be the kindest explanation of your—breach of trust. I warn you that, at the moment, I feel no impulse toward kindness."

"Colonel. Regard my warning, please. My 'breach of trust', as you put it, is a real thing. And it will be punished—if not by you then by the Council of Mandar. But the important thing at the moment—"

Lieutenant Wentz, standing stiffly at the closed flap of the tent, broke in. "He must be crazy, sir. He's been seven years in the Army, over five with the Corps. And now he claims to be—to be—not even human!"

Lan smiled. "I think I made no such claim, Hal. If I were green and twelve feet tall, my story would be

more easily believed, no doubt, but I would not have been much use in my job. No, I am as you see. And why not the Corps? Where better place to plant an agent?"

"It's impossible."

"There are more things in heaven and earth—' All the races of the Federation are human, Hal. Humanoid, let's say. Why not? Have you patented that shape?"

The colonel glanced at his watch. It was ten to seven. Zero minus ten. He called, "Sergeant Smith!"

The tent flap was pulled aside. "Yessir!"

"Inside, Smith. You will stay here with the captain. You're responsible for his being here when I return. Use what measures are necessary. If you are forced to shoot, shoot. Come on, Lieutenant. You and I have to get up to the blockhouse."

Lan—or Captain MacLeod—had risen to his feet, now not smiling, his blue eyes pale and blank. "Colonel. This one last plea. There are certain proofs I could offer—tests that would show up—peculiarities of my—structure. But there is no time, Colonel! If the Dunston-Link rocket penetrates the defensive shield of the Council's moon station, no power on earth or in space can prevent the retaliatory strike. It's automatic, Colonel, unmanned. That defensive strike, those distortion bombs were designed to be effective against a fleet of Grenships in deep space and at full battle range. You can't—their destructiveness within earth's atmosphere is unimaginable. They will take off along the path of your rocket before it ever reaches the lunar surface—hundreds of them—and within two hours they will be out of the moon's gravitational field and falling toward the earth—the unarmored, unprotected earth. For *your* God's sake, picture it, Colonel! Why should I lie about this? What do I

have to gain but the saving of Earthmen's lives? Colonel Pedersen, believe me—and stop that rocket!"

THE COLONEL'S big gray head had begun a negative motion before Lan had stopped speaking. He made a last bid. There were too many of them, it probably wouldn't work, but he had to try it. He didn't want to kill.

Lan seized the colonel's mind.

The negative motion stopped and, for a brief moment, the colonel appeared to be considering. Then he turned to the lieutenant. "All right, Hal. I still think he's crazy, but if there's a chance he's not—we can't take that chance. You wait here and I'll take him up to the blockhouse and let him talk to Dunston. That rocket wizard is half-mad himself. Maybe he can make sense of this guy."

Lan thought he had managed the phrasing very well but the tone was wrong, too wooden. Wentz was suspicious. "I'll go with you, sir."

"No, you wait here."

"No, sir."

"Lieutenant Wentz! That's an order!"

"No, sir. He—he's hypnotized you or something, sir. Your voice, your eyes. I won't do it."

It wasn't going to work. Carefully, Lan built up the frequency of his mind's pulsations. Not too much, for an elderly man, an Earth brain. Easy.

The colonel staggered back a step, lost his balance and fell across his canvas cot, unconscious.

Wentz said stiffly, "Sergeant Smith. Run for help, immediately. I'll watch the captain."

The lean sergeant's lank-jawed, hard-eyed face did not change expression. He stated flatly, "Nothing doing, Loot. Whatever he did to the colonel, he's doing to you. He can't do it to two of us at once—and if

you so much as turn pale, I'm going to cut loose with this chopper. Try the evil eye on that, Captain."

IT WAS zero minus three. The blockhouse was secured and Gordon Dunston had practically stopped breathing as he hovered over the firing contact, eyes glued to the circling red hand on the clock. All guard posts within a mile radius of the firing table had been abandoned.

LAN DIDN'T hesitate. There was no other way now; better one life than thousands. He switched his control to the sergeant's mind and, even as the ringing, stuttering blast of the Tommy gun began, he was at the flap of the tent. He saw Hal Wentz, dead as he fell, thrown back to fall across the colonel's unconscious form. He saw the sergeant staring dreadfully at the smoking muzzle of the sub-machine gun.

Lan leaped to the wheel of the jeep and stepped on the starter. The motor caught just as the windshield in front of him dissolved in fragments. He was in gear and rolling when the second burst came and he heard the whine of the slugs. Then no more shots. In second gear, he roared up the steep grade toward the supply road that had been cut into the amphitheatre, where the big rocket reared its shining length.

Sergeant Smith dropped his jammed Thompson gun and ran with a loping stride to his own tent. He snatched the Garand M-1 from his tentmate's bunk and was out again, letting off the safety as he ran. In the clear, he knelt and sighted uphill toward the road. His mind was occupied with the task in front of him, shying away from what lay in the colonel's tent on the colonel's neatly made cot.

At the curve in the road—about two-fifty yards, his rifleman's eye

judged—the jeep would run out of the shifting, deceitful shadow into the full light of the lowering sun. Smith took a deep breath and another, evenly, slowly. He saw the jeep, now, the blond, bare head over the wheel. He laid his cheek to the stock, calculating his lead. The jeep broke into the light. Smith took a last breath, let out a portion, held it. Slowly, tightening smoothly down, he squeezed off the shot.

Just one was all it took.

IT WAS zero minus one. The red second hand began its final sweep. Doctor Dunston kept his trembling hand clear of the contact, afraid of firing prematurely. Zero minus forty seconds. Thirty.

At zero minus ten seconds, a voice began to count them off. *Eight... seven... six...* Dunston depressed the switch and held it down... *five... four... three...* the huge metal bullet began to tremble as, the dampers withdrawn from the pile in the fire chamber, temperatures mounted swiftly... *two...* the mouth of the exhaust tube began to glow... *one...* there was a flare of white-hot flame and deadly radiation scorched the sides of the pit... the immensely heavy tube was standing miraculously on its flaming tail and oscillating slightly... *Zero! Rocket away!*

The Dunston-Link ARX-1 slid upward, unbelievably slowly, but accelerating. There was a gush of battering sound and the hills were lit with a blue-white radiance. The sound mounted. The blockhouse, ten-foot thick walls and all, trembled at its impact.

And, suddenly, the rocket was gone, a pale streak of fire mounting the skies to invisibility.

The radar trackers watched their screens intently and Dunston sighed in relief as, at zero plus forty seconds,

the rocket began to slow tilt into the planned path. In less than a minute, it was out of the earth's atmosphere and streaking eastward toward the spot where the moon would be in nine hours.

The telescopes picked them up first. At zero plus eight hours, the ARX-1 flashed through the defensive shield an hour out from the moon's surface, and the tiny points of sparkling brightness began to appear. Like diamonds in a snowbank. Hundreds, nay, thousands of diamonds winked and sparkled all over the lighted disc of the moon.

IN THE great hall of the Council of Mandar, an immense chamber

carved into the living metal of that massive, airless planet, the posthumous citation was read and unanimously approved for engraving in the List of Heroes of the Federation: "*Lan, citizen of the Federation of Worlds, agent of the Council of Mandar of the Federation of Worlds, and Hero of the Federation, who, at the call of duty and in true service to mankind, did not flinch from sacrifice but gave his labor unstintingly and, at last, his life in a futile but glorious attempt to save the peoples of Earth—then a planet of a small sun in Sector K—from destruction...*"

THE END

ARTIFICIAL GRAVITY

By SANDY MILLER

IN ANTICIPATION of the forces and strains that the human body is subjected to today in high speed jet and rocket planes, and in preparation for the special rockets of tomorrow, scientists are making great efforts to learn exactly what stresses the body can take. The Air Force has a whole laboratory in California devoted to just this purpose. One of the major projects, aside from a general study of the physiology of stress, is just exactly how huge forces—gravitational—affect the body.

People are familiar with the "blackout" of pilots who pull a plane from a dive. When the acceleration forces reach values of six or seven times gravity, the blood is forced from the brain and the mind blacks out—the pilot becomes unconscious. This is simply because the brain is drained of blood which is forced down into the body. Considerably greater forces can be withstood if the pilot lies horizontal. Then the blood is shifted only within the head slightly, and the gravitational resistance is stiffened.

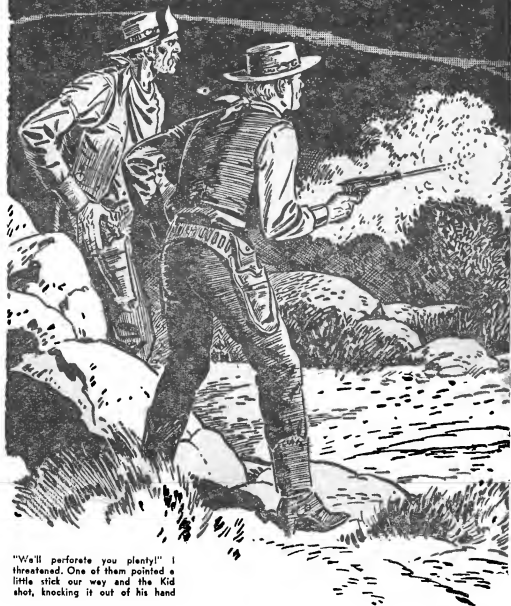
But of prime interest to scientists is the impulsive or quickly applied force, "the shocker" which slams the body around and which is ordinarily so damaging to human tissues. A specially constructed rocket catapult on rails has been built, equipped with padded seats and photographic recording apparatus. Using rockets, the catapult can be given a powerful acceleration, and by special electric brakes can be just as quickly decelerated. The result is that the subject can be ex-

posed to terrific jarring starts and stops such as he might experience in a rocket plane. And a complete record can be taken of his experiences.

The catapult car reaches a speed of one hundred and fifty miles an hour. Then it almost runs into a brick wall—it is so rapidly decelerated! The body abruptly weighs around four to six thousand pounds, the stop is made in less than fifteen hundredths of a second, and the body is subjected to a force twenty-five to forty times as great as gravity! But the human being is so padded and so cleverly cushioned that he can withstand these momentary forces without blacking out. Sometimes an arm or leg or other bone is broken—yet blackout does not occur. The principle involved, of course, is the slow deceleration of each component over a very short distance, and the uniform distribution of restraining pressure all over the surface of the body. You might almost compare this sort of thing with the observed fact that in automobile accidents of great severity, human beings often survive even though the forces have been incredible. For example, cases have been known where the head has smashed into the sheet metal dashboard without encountering any sharp articles. The uniform distribution of force didn't hurt the head but cushioned it.

A knowledge of these overwhelming forces is important for any group essaying a rocket trip of any sort. Shock forces are always involved. You must know how to combat them. And this testing school comes up with the answers!

RIDE THAT STARDUST TRAIL

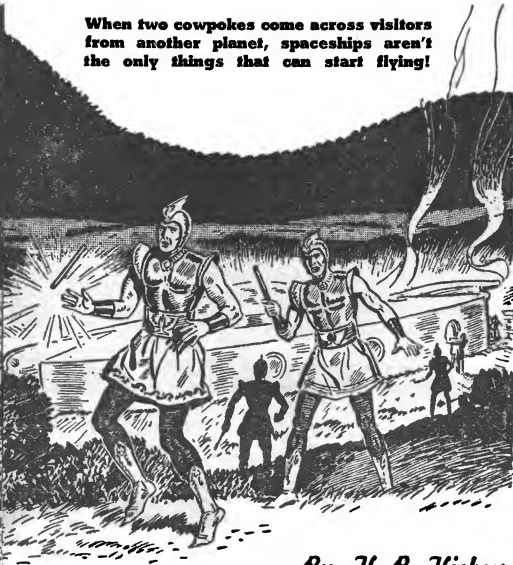


"We'll perforate you plenty!" I threatened. One of them pointed a little stick our way and the Kid shot, knocking it out of his hand

RIDE THAT STARDUST TRAIL



When two cowpokes come across visitors from another planet, spaceships aren't the only things that can start flying!



By H. B. Hickey

THE KID and me had come up to Abilene with a trail herd. We stuck around long enough to get drunk, play a little poker, and raise enough of a ruckus to get us an invitation to leave town, feet first or otherwise. We chose the otherwise.

Also, the poker having been profitable, we had a choice as to where we were going. We talked it over and

decided we'd seen enough of Texas. Texas being a large place, it didn't seem to leave us much new territory. But the Brazos Kid thought different.

"Yucca Bill," he said formally, giving me my full name, "I hear tell there are some valleys up in Montana country where the cattle get fat just looking at the lush grass. I am of a mind to discover the truth of the matter."

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"Kid," I said, "where would we be if Columbus hadn't took a chance? Let's pull stakes."

So, the money and the weather both holding out fine, we drifted north. We had fun on the way, getting into a shoot-out and a couple of scraps, all being close but not close enough for the Kid to lose any of his good looks. Which I didn't have to lose in the first place.

One bright blue afternoon, we found ourselves on top of a hill, with the whole beautiful world spread out below us. It was a sight to see, and the seeing clean took our breath away. When we got it back, the Kid heaved a sigh.

"Bill," he said, "I believe I will settle down. I will build me a house by that stream, raise me a herd, and get hog-fat and rich until the end of my days."

"Amen," I said. "Yea, verily, pard. The Land of Goshen had nothing on this."

And that same evening, we took a dip in that stream, ate some fish we had caught out of it, and spread our bedrolls under some trees near a big clearing.

Along about midnight, I began to stir, and at the same time I knew the Kid was stirring alongside me. We both sat up, not knowing yet just what it was, but both of us laying hands on iron just in case. We looked about carefully.

"Jehosaphat!" I whispered. "Injuns!"

"Yeah. And the fanciest ones I ever did see. Look at that tepee!"

I looked, and my eyes pretty near popped out. Here was this huge round tepee, shining in the moonlight like it was solid silver. But big as it was, there were only a couple of redskins walking around it.

"They don't know we're here," the Kid whispered.

"If they did, we wouldn't be wearing our hair," I said.

We didn't move for a while, just thought the situation over. And both of us got the same idea.

"Heck," the Kid said. "Ain't many of them. Let's mosey over for a look-see."

SO WE DRIFTED around the edge of the trees and got up closer. There were still only five or six of the Indians around, all of them busy carrying little boxes back and forth, kind of aimless like. They were dressed funny. Also, they weren't as dark red as the Indians I'd known, but sort of rosy looking. Which seemed natural enough, them being more northerly where they wouldn't get as much hot sun.

I was still looking, lost in wonder, when the Kid gave me an elbow in the ribs. "Bill! They're wise to us!"

Which, plain as my uncle's glass eye, they were. Not showing it, of course, but now and then flicking a glance our way. And I noticed that several new ones had eased out of the tepee.

The Kid and me stood there, cursing ourselves for getting so far away from our horses. If we ran, they could cut us off easy. The Kid looked at me, at them, and shrugged. I shrugged, too. We didn't have much choice.

We came out fast. The Kid had both sixguns out and pointed. I had my Winchester chest high and sweeping in short arcs.

"Elevate!" the Kid yelled.

"Grab sky!" I hollered. "You're surrounded!"

Nobody made a move. I figured fast and realized these redskins might not talk English. So I hollered again, "Reach! Raise your hands! Muy pronto!" I also threw in a couple of Cherokee words, which

also didn't get results.

We were stuck high and dry. What could we do? We didn't want to start any fireworks, there being a chance these heathens were friendly. On the other hand, if we lost the advantage of surprise, we could get our scalps lifted.

By this time, a couple of new ones had popped out of the big silver thing, which from up close was no tepee at all. Rather, it was a big round doodad like one of them tops with a spring on top.

I let out a couple of cuss words and so did the Kid. Again we ordered them to reach or take the consequences. A couple of them looked at each other. Then, the craziest thing in the world happened.

"Do you mean us harm?" one of them said. His English wasn't the usual kind, being soft and slurry like his tongue was paved with mink. But it was still English.

"Harm?" I yelled. "We'll perforate you plenty!"

That did it. One of them foolishly produced some kind of little stick and started to point it our way. Shooting from the hip, the Kid knocked it out of his hand.

There was a moment of silence. Nobody moved. But suddenly I was picked up and whirled around, and all I could see were stars. The Kid was going through the same.

We were getting the works.

FOR THE first time in my life, I woke up on something soft. At first, I thought I was dead in Heaven. But that was too unreasonable, so I opened my eyes and looked around. I was on a bed of some kind in a plain bare room, and all alone except for the Kid who was on a bed like mine right alongside me.

"Considering we must've tangled with some Texas twisters, you look

just fine," I said. Which was true. The Kid's black hair wasn't even mussed, and there wasn't a scratch on his handsome features.

"A gang of them must've snuck up behind us," the Kid said.

Just then the door opened and a couple of the rosy gents marched in. The Kid and I both reached for our weapons, but we were bare of them. So we relaxed and waited the turn of the cards.

"You are fortunate," one of them said. "The commander wished you taken unharmed."

"You're lucky yourself," I told him. "Catching us from behind like that."

"Behind?" said the other one, a fellow with some fancy uniform. Then he laughed, just as purry as he spoke. "Oh, they do not understand *zen*."

"I know one thing," I told him. "I don't like your looks. I'm getting out. Come on, Kid."

We both got up fast. Seeing they were unarmed, we figured we could take them. We were never more wrong.

"Sit down," the commander said.

We sat down, but hard. And without even wanting to. I began to get an idea of what this *zen* was. Some kind of powerful force they controlled. Looked like it beat a sixgun any day.

"I have never seen such warlike people," the commander said.

"We're peaceable enough," the Kid told him. "But we figured you for Indians and thought we'd get the drop on you."

"Hmmm," the commander said. "And does everyone carry those weapons with which you attempted to kill Purvo here?"

"Anyone who's a man carries them," I said. "But as for killing your friend Purvo—well, if the Kid had aimed to kill him, he'd have killed him!"

"So?" he murmured. "The Kid? And what is your name?"

"Yucca Bill. And this is the Brazos Kid. You might've heard of us."

"Never. But then, it is a large world." The room moved slightly and he looked around. "We are taking off. You may get up and walk around. But remember, anything which would cause this ship to crash would also result in your own deaths."

The Kid and me got up and found we were able to walk. I went over to a little window and looked out. My stomach turned. We were slowly rising over the tops of the trees!

"Wait!" I yelled, forgetting even to be scared.

"What is it?"

"My horse! I ain't going without my horse!"

And with that I turned around and went after them. This time, the *zen* didn't get me until I got the commander by the throat. The Kid had naturally sailed right in to help me and he had to be quieted, too.

There was now a long confab between the commander and Purvo, which resulted in the commander turning rosier than he was at first. He said something sharply in a strange language and Purvo quieted down.

"If we take this horse of yours aboard, will you give us your word you will make no more attempts to harm us?"

"I ain't making no promises," I said. "But if you don't get old Duke on here, you'll either have to shoot me or hang me before I quiet down."

WE WENT back down. They locked me and the Kid in our room, but we could see them get our horses. After a while, Purvo came and unlocked the door. However, by that time we were rising above the trees and I got a bit worried.

"Kid," I said, "these folks are in league with the Devil."

"If they are, he must've been looking the other way when I shot that stick out of Purvo's hand." The Kid grinned. "No, Bill, I reckon they're about the same kind of folks as we are."

"Well, they ain't no kind I ever heard tell of. I seen Chinese and all kinds and none of them looked like these."

It was just then that Purvo came in, and he supplied the answer to my questions. "We are not of this planet," he said.

"See?" I told the Kid.

He was looking at Purvo. "Well, you must come from somewheres," he said.

"In due time," Purvo purred. "Meanwhile, you have the freedom of the ship. But remember Commander Esdrel's warning."

So we went out into the big round body of the ship and moseyed around until we found our cayuses. They had been put in a room just like ours, and they seemed contented enough, having been supplied with some grass. I guess the commander had seen them munching some, and figured it wouldn't do any harm to bring along a little, which kind of figuring raised him some in my estimation.

After we'd made sure the horses were all right, we went along until we found the control room. There were several fellows in uniform sitting around some shiny dials and cabinets, writing down some stuff. Others were busy pushing buttons. In a few minutes, Esdrel came around.

"Interesting, is it not?"

"Yeah," I grunted. "I figure these must be the reins, but what makes the mare go?"

He looked blank, and the Kid said,

"That's horse talk."

"And a better pony for cutting out a spooky steer I never did see," I announced.

Esdrel shook his head. "Tell me," he said, "what manner of people are you who inhabit this continent? It is strange that a man should rather die than leave behind an animal. And stranger still that men should carry weapons always with them. Are you so warlike?"

"No more'n most," I said. "Of course, we do a bit of fighting just for fun."

"For fun..." Esdrel murmured. He began to look worried, and when Purvo and another important looking gent showed up shortly, he started to palaver with them in their own language.

Then they gathered around the Kid and me.

"Tell us something about your country and your people," the commander suggested pleasantly. "How many of you are there? Is it the truth that all men go armed?"

"I reckon it's your turn first, seeing we're sort of your guests," I said. "Seems to me you ducked one I threw at you before."

"We shall be happy to explain everything in due course," he said.

"Same to you," said the Kid.

Right away, the atmosphere changed. Maybe his voice was purry, but there was plenty of cold steel in the commander. His eyes got hard and his mouth narrowed down. Purvo and the others looked angry and started crowding in.

"There are ways to make you talk," Purvo grated. He pulled out one of the little shiny sticks and started to point it.

The Kid hit him first, and then I nailed him. He lost interest.

So did we. The room was whirling, and this time there was a pain in

my head when I started to whirl. Somehow, I kept swinging, and I knew I was hitting something. From far away, there was lots of hollering. The hollering got louder, and suddenly the room was still and the pain was gone and I could see again.

"Stop!" a voice was saying. "I command you to stop!"

It was a lovely voice. Not only for what it said, but the way it said it. Purry, but kind of singsong with a sweet lilt. The Kid and I turned to see who our pal was. The Kid blinked. I turned bright red, being the shy type.

SHE WAS nothing more than the rosiest and softest looking rose petal ever made up in the shape of a woman. Her eyes were violet. Her figure was something I'd seen in dreams before, but didn't think really existed. And there wasn't much except a silky, flimsy bit of stuff covering it.

"Now I know how John Smith felt when Pocahantas showed up," the Kid muttered to me.

"We thank you from the heart, noble Princess," he said to her, trying to be flowery like he thought one should talk to a Princess.

She looked squarely at him. "You know I am a Princess?"

"You see?" Purvo barged in. "They know more than they pretend."

"I see you already got one shiner," I said happily. "And you'll have another if you interrupt the lady again."

If looks could kill, the one he gave me out of his good eye could have put me in cold storage forever. His other eye was a lovely purple by now, and I knew what it was I had hit.

"There will be no more violence," she said sharply. And to Esdrel: "My father would not want it. You know that."

"What if they are of the Harva?"

he asked.

"We are pure Texas," I informed him. "Except for some eastern red-eye we got in our veins."

"Perhaps if I spoke to them, they might understand we mean no harm," the Princess suggested.

The commander shook his head like he didn't think it was such a great idea. He looked at us and said something to her in their language. I got the idea he was telling her he was afraid we might get rough.

So the Princess cast her violet gaze on us and answered in English: "I am sure that rough as they seem, they would not attempt to harm me."

"Rest assured, lovely Princess, that such is the case," the Kid averred, and she favored him with a royal smile.

FROM THE minute we entered Princess Marna's quarters, things began to look up. She invited us to have a drink and we accepted. Unfortunately, the stuff was like water. Later, I found out it was water.

She looked from me to the Kid and the contrast being what it was, she let her eyes remain on him. When she spoke, it was also mostly to him. "You must believe me when I tell you we mean no harm," she said.

"I'd shoot the man who wouldn't believe you," said the Kid.

"Then tell me something about this land of yours. We have visited others, yet the people were nothing like you, although to tell the truth, we saw them only from a safe distance."

"Meaning no disrespect, but before we talk too much, maybe you oughta tell us where you're from and how come you talk the language so good."

"As to where we are from," the Princess said, taking our arms and leading us to a window, "we are from there."

I looked. The Kid looked. We both

gulped seeing that there was nothing around us but very dark space. We looked again and saw no more than the usual number of stars and such.

"Where?" I said.

"There." She pointed to one of the biggest of the stars. "That one. I believe you call it Venus."

"You're kidding," I said, but my heart wasn't in it. Somehow, I knew it was true.

She went on: "As for the language, we find it very simple to learn any spoken tongue. Pausing in many places since our arrival on this planet, we have learned many languages."

And right pronto she proceeded to rattle off a string of what I recognized as Spanish. She also threw around a bit of singsong very much like a couple of Chinese mess cooks would. By the time she finished, the Princess had easily covered ten or eleven languages.

"Golly," I said. "And after all these years, I don't even talk one lingo so good."

She giggled. "With *zen* it is easy. Would you like to learn ours?"

What could we lose? The Kid and me nodded our heads. This time, the *zen* had a different kind of body English on it. I just got woozy. All kinds of funny words went running through my head, one after the other. Then the words stopped and the wooziness went away.

"There," she said. "That was simple, was it not?"

"Can't tell yet... Hey!" I yelled. It struck me that we were both not speaking English!

"Well, I guess you are really on the up and up," the Kid said to her. "But what you want to come moseying around here for, I don't know. Or why you want to pick up a couple of common punchers like Bill and me."

"Truthfully, and in short, we came

here because this planet is most like our own. We came here to discover whether some of our people might find safe habitation here."

"Made up your mind yet?"

"Many places were uninhabitable. Others were already overrun with people. But on a large island, where people spoke your tongue, we heard of a land to the westward which held promise."

"Ain't no place else like this," I told her proudly.

Her face got sad. "I don't know. You seem pleasant enough, even courteous, and yet your mien is definitely bellicose. You go armed for conflict. Is there no law and order in your land?"

"In our part, that is taken care of by a man named Colt. Also by Judge Lynch," I said.

She didn't get it, and the Kid hastened to elucidate: "But there are more peaceable sections," he said. "Reckon those would be crowded, too, though. And the immigration laws might make it tough."

BY THE time we left the Princess Marna's presence—after a pleasant pat on the arm for both of us—she knew something about the U.S.A. We also knew a smattering or two about her situation.

Seemed as how Venus and the earth were much alike. But whereas only about three-fifths of our little planet was covered with water, there was water over three-fourths of Venus. Being that folks are folks anywhere, the population now was getting the squeeze.

Also, there was the problem of the Harva, which Purvo had mentioned. The one place on Venus which had never been explored was a big section hemmed in by extra-high mountains. From old tales, the belief was current that some strange people lived there,

with skins more like the Kid's and mine.

For about three thousand years, the Harva had been lying low, but lately they had started pulling off some sneak raids, Indian-like, and let the idea get around that they were giving the Basra, which were Marna's folks, twenty-four hours to get off Venus.

All in all, it was a kettle of fish, not so pretty. The Kid and me got back to our room and shook our heads at each other. We lighted up and settled down for a serious talk.

"You wanted a change," I said. "Looks like we're going to get one."

"They can't more than kill us, which a Piute could do as well."

I shook my head sadly. "I kinda feel sorry for the Basra," I said. "Can't no Horace Greeley tell them to go West where there is more room."

"I dunno," the Kid said.

"You mean you think the Princess is lying?"

"Just because she pats your arm don't mean she is necessarily as sweet as she acts."

The Kid having had more experience than me with pretty gals patting his arm, I kinda figured he could see it clearer. I knew the feel of her hand had kinda muddled my head.

"You know," the Kid said, "with the zen stuff, she could tell us black is white and we'd believe her."

"So?"

"So we are still in enemy country. I wish I had my artillery."

"Ask the Princess," I told him. "Maybe she was just putting on for me, but she let her hand rest on yours longer than she had to."

"She sure is pretty all right," the Kid sighed. "Well, let's go to sleep."

A NOISE woke us. It was the kind of noise people make when they are all excited and don't know what to do. Out in the main part of the

ship, we could hear shouting and running around, and all of it sounded like bad news.

The Kid and me jumped out of bed and kicked our feet into our boots. While doing this, I happened to note that from the window right beside us, I could see down into some kind of rolling country. Overhead, the sky was grey and cloudy. Looked like a change in the weather was due.

We had been put on our honor, sort of, by the Princess, and our door was not locked. The Kid and me scooted out to the control room, where most of the excitement now appeared to be.

Purvo was hollering at some of the fellows who were handling the instruments. Esdrel had the Princess over to one side and was jabbering at her. From the looks of his face, he was plenty worried about something.

"Should we ever reach safety, I shall kill myself!" he was vowing. "I take all the blame for allowing your life to be jeopardized."

"I'm sure it's not your fault," the Princess said calmly. "But what can be done?"

"What's the matter?" the Kid and I asked in one breath as we came dashing up.

The commander just grumbled under his breath, but Marna gave us the dope: "By mistake, we broke through Venus' cloud blanket over the land of the Harva. Now, it appears we are in the grip of some force which has taken the ship out of control. We'll be lucky to land without crashing."

"We'll be luckier still to crash and die before the Harva get us," Esdrel said glumly.

Then, he rushed off to see what he could do with the instrument panels. The Kid and Marna and me went to the nearest window and took a gander. It was plain neither Esdrel nor Purvo nor any of them was having much

success. The ship was veering from left to right, then back again, and all the time the ground rushed closer and closer.

I began to hold my breath. So did the Kid. Marna had hold of his arm and she was squeezing hard enough to make her knuckles white. Otherwise, though, she was holding together like you'd think a Princess should.

The ground came at us very fast. I heard myself humming some song about burying me out where the violets grow. Another look and I could almost count each separate leaf in some purple plant as it came up to meet us.

There was a sudden jerk that sent me spinning.

"Whoa!" I yelled. The sensation was like having your horse step into a gopher hole at full speed.

Then, with a slight quiver, the ship settled gently to the ground. The sighs of relief sounded like a breeze through the trees. We were safe, at least temporarily.

But only temporarily. We had come to rest in a small clearing near the center of a little valley. And now, from all sides at once, a howling horde came rushing at us!

"THE HARVA!" Esdrel shouted.

"Every man to the portholes!"

His order was obeyed instantly. Every man jack rushed to a porthole and got it part way open. Then, they all got out their little shiny sticks and started pointing them.

By this time, the Harva were only a hundred yards or so away. The Kid and I peeked over shoulders and looked at them.

To tell the truth, they didn't look like so much. In color they were about the same as us, and also in size. Except that there were so many of them and they looked like they wanted our blood, they didn't seem unusual at all.

Most of them were wearing short pants and some sort of sandals, so it was plain that we hadn't landed in a cold climate. For armament, most of them carried clubs and what looked like big slingshots. A few, but not many, had little silver sticks.

"Why don't you shoot?" I yelled to Esdrel. The Harva were close enough to see the whites of their eyes.

Esdrel held up his hand for me to be quiet. He waited another couple of seconds. "Fire!" he commanded.

Expecting to hear some fireworks, I was disappointed. No sound at all. But when I looked out, I could see that things had happened, all right.

Half the front row of Harva was slowing down to a stumbling, shambling walk. Then they fell flat on their faces. The same thing happened to those right behind them. In another minute, they had enough and were in full retreat.

But they didn't go far! They moved back maybe thirty, forty yards and stopped for a conference. In the meantime, those who had been hit were picking themselves up and crawling away.

"You didn't get a single one of them," I said disappointedly.

"Zvi guns only paralyze momentarily," Marna explained. "They do not kill or maim."

I was about to tell her that folks with such artillery should stick closer to home, but I got interrupted. There was a sudden crackling like hail on the roof, only much heavier. The Harva had let fly with their slingshots.

A MOMENT later, one of the portholes cracked. Then another. The Harva were getting the range. Still, it was nothing much to worry about. Until suddenly one of the men on the other side of the ship let out a yell. "Look!" he called.

Esdrel rushed over to his side and

I heard him grunt. Marna and the Kid and me got over there, too, and Esdrel pointed out the cause of all the commotion.

The Harva had set some kind of catapult about a hundred yards away and were busy loading big rocks into it!

"Where're our guns?" I demanded. "The Kid and me'll put a stop to that in a hurry!"

Esdrel was too excited to pay me any mind, and I had to grab his arm to get his attention. Even then he didn't seem to know what I wanted.

"Our guns!" the Kid told him. "The thing I shot Purvo with! From a hundred yards, Bill and I can shoot their teeth out!"

Esdrel seemed to get the idea. But then he looked suspicious. Purvo had come up and was strictly against it. I started to fix his one good eye when Marna intervened.

"It's our only chance," she said. "Get their weapons!"

Unfortunately, all this palaver had taken too much time. While Esdrel was fumbling around with a big bunch of keys, there came a sound like the roof caving in. The Harva had let loose with a king-size boulder.

The ship rocked. Another boulder and we got another jolt. Esdrel was still fumbling with his keys and not making any headway.

"We will be too late," Purvo cried. "They are preparing another rush!"

Esdrel looked around through the other portholes and it was plain that Purvo was right. The commander shook his head and stared at the Princess.

"For your safety, I believe we should surrender," he told her.

"Never!" she said like a true Princess. Esdrel said something to the effect that while there's life there's hope, but when you're dead the party's over. The Princess went on shak-

ing her head. She was more scared of the Harva than of death.

"I'm sorry," Esdrel said sharply. "As commander of this ship, I must do what I think best. We shall surrender." He snapped out an order: "Cease fire!"

We could hear the Harva yelling now as they rushed toward the ship. There was still a rattle of rocks, but even that stopped as they realized we were not defending ourselves. The yelling got louder, until it was right outside.

A SECOND later, we heard them banging at the main door. The door apparently wasn't too solid, for it gave in a hurry. A flood of Harva poured into the room. Some of them grabbed the men, yanking the sticks out of their hands. Others rushed toward us.

Two of them laid hands on Marna, and they were not friendly hands, either. The Kid grabbed one man and lambasted him. I hit the other.

Then, six or seven of them came at us, and it was as fine a brawl as I ever horned in on. Being built on the lines of a barrel, without much neck, I don't damage easy. I got in six or seven punches to every one I took.

The Kid was also doing fine, and for a few minutes there we almost got the notion we could lick the gang of them. But, of course, we couldn't. Every time a man went down, another two took his place. They began to snow us under.

A club swung and bounced off my arm. Another one nicked my shoulder and set me up for the last one. It landed smack against my jaw. Another star-filled trip and I went back to riding the Texas range again.

I awoke in an unhappy situation. There was the smell of food, but my jaw was so sore it hurt to open my

mouth.

"Oh, you're waking up," I heard the Kid say. "For a while, I thought you were dead."

I sat up and found myself in a rough, stone-walled room. The Kid was sitting at a big table, facing me, and stuffing his mouth with the fodder that smelled so good.

"You seem to be enjoying yourself," I said. "Shove over so I can eat, too."

The food turned out to be some kind of vegetable, cut up in small bits. It smelled good, tasted good, and I didn't have too much trouble chewing. For a while, the Kid and I didn't do any talking.

"At least," he said as we wiped our mouths with the backs of our hands, "they don't mean to starve us to death."

"Maybe the Harva are cannibals and are just fattening us for their own feast," I suggested.

"Yeah. I wonder how Marna is getting treated." He looked worried and I couldn't help grinning.

"That's the gal you didn't want to trust," I said.

"Things change. Although there are plenty of things I can't figger about this setup."

While I was trying to think what seemed so suspicious, I got out the makings and rolled myself a smoke. I just got it lit when the door opened.

The Kid grinned. "You got you a princess, too," he said.

Sure enough, it was a lady guard who came in.

She took one look at me and let out a shriek of terror. Ducking into the corner nearest the door, she cowered there with her hands over her face.

"What's the matter with her?" I said, getting sore. "I'm not as ugly as all that."

"Wait," the Kid said. "I think I know what it is. Your smoke. She's

probably never seen anyone smoke before."

While he muttered soothing words, I doused the smoke in vegetable gravy. Sure enough, she peeked out between her fingers and decided I was not a devil after all. However, when she took her hands away from her face, I wasn't so sure about her.

She was beyond doubt the ugliest woman I had ever seen. Her nose was half as wide as her face; when she moved, her jowls bounced like a couple of saddlebags. Her forehead was exactly one inch high.

"Was the food good?" she asked, more to me than to the Kid.

"What there was of it. I still got room for a steak."

She kept looking at me, kind of fawning, kind of smiling. I didn't know what to make of it. I looked at the Kid and he grinned again.

"She seems to think you're pretty handsome, Bill," he whispered. "Why don't you try to find out what we're in for?"

WHAT COULD I lose? I tried to remember how the Kid and other ladies' men talk. And when I looked at her face, I found I wasn't shy at all.

"Lovely princess," I said, trying out a bow, "we thank you for the grub."

This pleased her plenty, and I tried some more, making a crack or two about her good looks. She dodged when I tried to pat her arm, but that was only because she was afraid I'd blow smoke at her. Once she was sure the fire was out, she lost her fear.

"Lovely maiden," I said, keeping my face straight, "have we got to stay locked up?"

"I do not know." Her voice was way deeper than mine. "You are not of the Basra; therefore, you may not be our enemy."

"Why're you sore at the Basra?"

the Kid asked her.

"Long ago, they tried to take our land from us. Now it is said they will try again. And our chief is not certain about the two of you."

"Is your chief a big chief?" I asked. "How many tribes are under him?"

She was puzzled by the tribe angle, but when I explained, she shook her head. "There is but one chief for each tribe. How else could it be?"

"Don't ask me. Look, lovely maiden," I went on, "how's chances of our flying this coop?"

"Escape? Fly? I do not know. I heard that the ship you came in is able to fly again."

"Where are the rest of those from the ship?" the Kid asked.

"In the cells along this hall. I bring the food for all prisoners."

"Uh-huh. And what's going to happen to the Basra prisoners?"

"I do not know that. Perhaps they will be killed. Our chief and other neighboring chiefs have spoken to the leader of the ship and now are deciding what to do. Probably they will be killed."

"You wouldn't want to see us killed, would you?" I asked, taking her hand.

"Oh, no." She hung her head coyly, looking only twice as bad as usual. "I like you. You are very nice. And you are not of the Basra."

I nodded and smiled. This wasn't so hard, after all. Of course, it was probably a good many years since any man had been so nice to her.

"Help us escape," I whispered, "and you could come with us."

"But the only escape is through the mountains. It is very difficult."

"Just show us the way. We can get by. And you could come with us."

IT TOOK some fast talking, but at last she started to weaken. During

the day, she explained, there were too many guards. But at night there were only a few, and they had the usual habit of napping on the job.

"Tonight," she said, "halfway between dark and dawn I will come. I will knock twice, very softly, and lift the bar outside your door."

Not knowing just what we would run into, there was not much planning to do. I just spent the rest of the day feeling pleased with my work. Of course, I reminded myself, it was wrong to deceive a poor girl like that. But, on the other hand, a guy's got a right to save his life.

We got another meal along toward dark—this one brought by another woman, also very ugly. I tried to find out if my friend was through for the day or just working a split shift, but this new gal wasn't talking.

The Kid and I turned in right after supper, being that there were no lights anyway and we figured we would need all the rest we could get.

Sure enough, he woke me in the pitch dark. After a minute, my eyes adjusted and it was not really dark, but dark enough.

"Must be about three," he whispered.

"Yeah." It felt about that time. I got him close and whispered in his ear. "Anything gets in our way, we'll just have to start swinging."

All he said was, "Give me a hand with this chair."

Not asking questions, I helped him carry the heavy chair over near the door. We stood there for what seemed like an hour. Then, very soft, we heard somebody moving outside.

"You take the chair," I whispered.

"Don't move," he whispered back.

We heard the bar lift. The door swung open. I started to come out, but the Kid's arm stopped me. With a gentle shove, he sent the chair sliding out into the corridor.

And all Hell broke loose!

THERE WAS noise! Men were howling in pain and anger and you could hear the sound of bodies getting struck with heavy objects.

Suddenly a light flared up. We saw the corridor full of struggling Harva. They seemed to be trying to beat each others' brains out. I took a look at who was holding the light and it was none other than my ugly girl friend!

"Something go wrong?" the Kid inquired sweetly. He leaned against the wall near the door.

The woman looked up and saw us inside the room, and for a second or two she had a look on her face like she wanted to come in and tear us apart all by herself.

"Stop!" she screamed. "Stop! They are still inside."

The rest of the Harva untangled themselves. A few were in bad shape, having had the bad luck to get stuck at the bottom of the pile. They were bleeding from cuts and seemed pretty well beat up.

"Now, if you'll cut out the racket, maybe we can go back to sleep," the Kid said.

He banged the door shut, and I heard the bar fall back in place. Outside, there was more noise; then gradually footsteps faded away and the light disappeared from under the chink in the door.

I looked at the Kid. "Well," I said, "just what would you call that?"

"Your princess was just a little too willing," the Kid pointed out. "And I noticed a look in her eye like I've seen on a dance hall girl who is about ready to lift a drunk's pay from his pocket."

It broke me up. Here was the ugliest woman I'd ever seen and I couldn't even get her to fall for me! Right then I swore off women forever.

"But why?" I wondered. "Why go

through this whole business?"

"I guess the idea was for us to get killed trying to escape."

"It don't make sense."

"No, not from her angle. Not unless it makes sense to someone higher up. Well, no use trying to figure it out. Let's hit the hay." However, as we groped our way back to bed, the Kid grabbed my arm. He put his mouth up close to my ear. "While they were scrapping, I managed to get a loop over that bar. Let's go!"

We slipped back to the door, and the Kid whispered for me to strike a match. I got one lit and cupped it high up in my hands so no light would get out under the door. Sure enough, there was a bit of string hanging over the top of the door.

THE KID took the end of the string and pulled gently as far as it would go. The door opened. We could feel a change in the air. For a long minute we stood there holding our breath. Then the Kid pulled me along toward the next barred door. We felt our way until we hit it. Another couple of seconds and we were inside the room.

I struck another match—and there was the Princess Marna lying on a nice soft-looking couch. We slid over to her and the Kid bent down and whispered in her ear.

She jumped like a scared rabbit and started to let out a squeak. The Kid had to clamp his hand over her mouth.

"It's us," he said. "I figured you'd be awake account of that noise a few minutes ago."

"What in the world was that?" she asked as he let go of her mouth.

"An accident waiting for the Kid and me to happen," I told her.

There was no time now for more palaver. We found out in a moment that all the men from the ship, including Esdrel and Purvo, were in

the room next to hers.

While the Princess waited in the corridor, the Kid and me went in for the men.

Of course, Purvo wanted to know just how we got out and so forth. Esdrel, being commander, felt he should ask the questions. Finally, we had to tell them both to shut up.

So far, we had run into no trouble. There were no guards in the corridor. I suppose that after all that excitement, they figured to get some rest. Taking it easy in the darkness, we followed the wall around some twists and turns until we saw a light ahead.

"Whoa," the Kid whispered. "Bill and I will go up ahead to take a look. The rest of you stay put until we signal."

We moved around another turn and found ourselves coming out at the back of a big room. At the other end of it was a heavy door, and we knew it was the last door between us and the outside because through some high windows we could see a faint light of dawn.

There was only one difficulty. Two armed guards were pacing up and back together. The Kid and me ducked back as they made the turn and came around facing us.

It was a bad spot to be in, especially as there was no turning back. The Kid and me crouched there, listening to the footsteps. We both knew what we had to do.

The footsteps came closer at a steady pace. There was a pause and one of the guards cleared his throat and mumbled something. Probably the usual grumble of guards about it being lousy luck to have the night watch. Then the footsteps got fainter. They had turned the other way.

The Kid and me made it in a rush, doing a job of coming up so fast and quiet that any Indian would envy it. Before they knew we were there, we

each had a wrist against an Adam's apple and were squeezing. I guess I squeezed too hard, because I felt something give.

My man went dead, and I dropped him. By this time, the Kid had got a good grip and was putting on the pressure. He had his knee in the guard's back, and the man couldn't move or make a sound. Another few seconds and the job was done. We turned around and scooted back down the corridor.

"All right," the Kid snapped. "Make it fast now."

This was one time he didn't have to repeat himself. Everyone started running. With the Kid and me in the lead, we came streaming around the turn of the corridor.

And right smack into more trouble!

THERE WERE three fresh guards coming in from outside just as we hit the big room. This time, there was no chance for a surprise attack. They saw us coming and let out a sharp yell for help, and then turned their shiny sticks at us.

"Watch the Princess!" the Kid called.

We ducked low as we came at them, but even so something nicked my arm and sent a paralyzing pain up through it. Sheer momentum kept me going, though, and the next thing I knew I had a shoulder in someone's belly.

I heard a satisfying grunt. By this time, the pain had left my arm and I slammed away with both hands. The opposition wilted in a hurry. But now there was fresh trouble as a couple of reinforcements arrived, spurred on by the previous call for help.

Esdrel wanted to stop and give the Kid and me a hand, but the Kid sent him on his way with a shove. After that, I was too busy to pay much attention to anything else but my own problems.

These Harva were not the cleanest fighters. I got a knee where it hurt. In return, I did some fast eye gouging and drove my opponent back where I could reach him with a punch.

The thing hadn't lasted more than two minutes. I straightened up to see the Kid polish off his man. From off at one side, there was a gang of the Harva racing our way, and up ahead we saw our own crowd making tracks over the brow of a small rise.

"Come on!" the Kid gasped. And we ran. It was many years since I had done much running afoot, but I found behind me all the encouragement I needed. It seemed like a year, but actually it was only a couple of minutes before we cleared the rise.

Right ahead of us and in the clearing where we landed was the ship. The Princess and some of the men were already inside. Putting on a fresh burst of speed, the Kid and me arrived just as the last man was going through the door. We barged right in after him, and the door slammed behind us.

"Take off!" the Kid yelled.

Stones were beginning to rattle off the ship. Esdrel and Purvo looked at the Kid as though they'd just realized something.

"But the controls failed!"

"Try them!" the Kid yelled, and added a couple of encouraging words he never learned in Sunday school.

There was no arguing with that tone of voice. One of the men grabbed a lever and pulled it. My knees almost hit my chin, we went up that fast. Within seconds, the Harva were just little dots below us, and in another few seconds we lost the dots.

Marna was looking at the Kid—a glance which any judge of women would say meant something. Since I'd given up judging women after my recent experience, I didn't even try to figure what it meant. One thing for

sure, though. Esdrel and Purvo didn't like it. Not being afraid to judge men, I was sure the Kid had horned his way into a two-horse race, and was now number three. As we headed through the clouds, I resolved to keep my eyes open.

BASRATA was the city, a mass of huge stone buildings on the shores of a rolling blue ocean. I had never seen so many people in my life at one time, and all of them were jammed into a space not nearly big enough.

Around the city for a way there were green fields, but further out it looked bare. The Kid and me created quite a stir, even more so than the return of the ship. Our horses were also a sensation, there being no animals but a few small catlike creatures around. The first time the Kid and me rode out for a look around, we caused a panic.

Altogether, we were kept busy for a while. We met King Drugo, Marna's father and a nice white-haired old gent. He asked a lot of questions which our answers didn't do much to satisfy. After that, we had some time to ourselves.

The Kid and me had the run of the palace, more or less, and I took a few walks with Marna through the gardens. It turned out she just wanted to hear me talk about the Kid, and I related several of his exploits.

"There must be many women in your native country who love him," she said.

"Maybe. But it only counts when the favor is returned. I'd say you shouldn't do bad yourself, Princess. Looks to me like Purvo and Esdrel wouldn't mind holding hands, to name just two."

She blushed prettily. And quickly changed the subject. "Tell me, do you long to return to your homeland?"

"Frankly, yes. As soon as you can

arrange transportation. Not that we have been mistreated, mind you, but personally I like a little more action."

"I was afraid you would feel that way. Well, I shall arrange an audience with my father."

So the next day, the Kid and me were ushered into the King's presence. He had several of his advisors around him, including Purvo and Esdrel.

"My daughter tells me you have asked to be returned to your own planet," the King says. "I am afraid that would be difficult, if not impossible."

"That's your problem," I told him. "We didn't exactly get a written invitation to come along."

"Perhaps so. Yet the manner of your meeting with our ship is not above suspicion. Nor the ease with which you escaped from the Harva. It is for that reason you have not been allowed to have your weapons. Therefore, it is the decision of myself and my council that for a while, at least, although you may move about freely, you must remain as our guests."

KING DRUGO waved his hand, signifying that poker was closed for the day, and his council got up to leave. But when the Kid and me started to move, Marna's father beckoned us to remain behind. We stayed put until everyone else was gone.

Up to that time, I hadn't noticed, but now I saw that a good many of the lines in the King's face had been put there by worry and weariness.

"Sit down," he said. We sat, and for a minute he just looked at the Kid. "I will come to the point," he started out. "Word reaches me that you have been seen kissing Princess Marna."

Meaning the Kid, not me. The Kid turned red but met the King's glance

squarely. "My intentions are honorable," he said.

The King looked surprised, as if he didn't understand. Then all of a sudden he started to laugh. I guess it was the first time in a long time he had a real laugh, and he made the most of it. The Kid got redder still, and the King stopped laughing.

"I did not mean to embarrass you. As a matter of fact, I wish I had a son who was as honorable and manly as you seem." He shook his head sadly. "However, things are not so simple as all that. Marna tells me that she finds you desirable. In any other situation, that would be sufficient. But in her case, no. She is a Princess, and sole heir to this throne."

"In other words," I interrupted angrily, "she is too good for a plain cowboy."

"Not too good," the King said. "But still a Princess. Apparently, you do not appreciate the difficulties monarchies have."

"They are going out of style where we come from," I said.

"Even here. My problems have become many. I grow older, not younger. The council has had to take more and more authority. It is their desire, and my people's, that Marna marry someone of high rank among the Basra."

"Meaning Purvo or Esdrel."

"You have sharp eyes," he admitted. "Either of them would be considered suitable."

"By himself, anyway. And you're afraid to buck them." The Kid was all steamed up. "What are they going to do, draw straws for her?"

Now it was the King's turn to get red in the face. "Even if it comes to that," he retorted.

It was a mighty sad admission for a man to make, and for a minute or two we all sat in silence. I found myself feeling sorry for the old man.

"Would you care to ride out with me?" he asked suddenly. "I'd like to show you something."

SOME TWENTY minutes later, the King, the Kid and me were standing on a little knoll a fair way out of town. Twenty minutes was all it had taken for us to get from the palace, past the city walls and past the green fields. We did it in a little car built like the space ship, but much smaller. It skimmed just a few feet off the ground.

"This is half my problem," the King said bitterly. He pointed to the brown earth on which there were only patches of what looked like scrub grass. "In all the history of Venus, nothing but these weeds have ever grown here."

"Tried irrigation?" the Kid asked.

"We have tried everything. Nothing will grow. And this kind of land makes up more than half the dry ground on Venus. Year by year, despite most intense cultivation, our food supply dwindles. Our people are restive. They demand action."

"And now trouble with the Harva," the Kid added.

"Yes. We had almost ceased to believe in their existence. Now they reappear, apparently bent on conquest."

"Have you tried peace talks?"

"Our emissaries have all failed to return."

"Then get the army out," the Kid snorted. "From what we saw of them, they ain't so much."

"You come from warlike people," the King smiled sadly. "We have no army, in your sense. Our entire armed force is merely for the purpose of maintaining law and order. Esdrel does not command over two thousand men. And our arms, as you have seen, are ineffectual."

"Well, if you can't go elsewhere, and you can't stay here, you are in

a bad way," I told him. "Why doesn't Esdrel get after the Harva?"

"He believes we should move slowly. And as commander-in-chief, his opinion carries much weight."

The Kid nodded his head. "One thing, though. Why didn't they use *zen* against the Harva, like they did against us?"

"They did," King Drugo said. "But it was not effective. Apparently, the Harva understand *zen* too."

"Oh," said the Kid, and he turned to me: "Bill, what do you make of this stuff?" He pointed at the ground, so I hunkered down for a look. I picked up a blade of the weed and chewed it thoughtfully.

"Just some mangy old scrub grass, or something like it," I said.

"Yeah. Give you any ideas?"

I stared at him. A bolt of lightning hit me. "Pard," I said, "if you are thinking what I am thinking, you just had the greatest idea since gunpowder!"

KING DRUGO was dumbfounded.

He watched while I took the Kid and did an Apache hop with him. The Kid has always come through when the chips are down.

"Your Majesty," the Kid said, "I think that except for the Harva, your troubles are over!"

"I don't understand."

"You don't have to move anywhere. And your people don't have to starve."

"But why?"

"Tell him," the Kid said to me, "who eats this kind of grass."

"Sheep," said I. "Also cows. In other words, animals that can later be eaten as food!"

"But where would we get these animals?" the King asked.

"It'd be easier to import a few head from Earth, than to export all your people."

By this time, the King was really excited. We went back to the royal carriage and whizzed off toward the palace. All the way, he plied us with questions. "It seems incredible," he said. "How can you be certain?"

I got an idea of my own. "Look. The Kid and I can ride out on our horses and let them sample the stuff. If they eat it and don't get sick, then cattle and sheep can eat it too."

"Agreed," said the King. He looked at us fondly. "Honestly, you know, I never concurred in Esdrel's and Purvo's suspicions of you."

It was a big thing, naturally. As soon as we got back, the King got hold of Purvo and issued a call for a council meeting. The Kid and me saddled up and rode out.

By now, we were smart enough to take the streets where there were less people, but even so there was much excitement. I could see it was going to be a problem getting together some cowhands. They were more afraid of the strange animals than they were of the Kid and me.

But for the moment, we ignored the screams of frightened children and the stares of their parents. We kept going at a steady gallop, and soon were out in the rolling brown countryside.

"Well, this is it," the Kid said.

We dropped reins and dismounted. There was plenty of tension. No telling what a horse will refuse to eat. But now that we had led them to it, there was nothing to do but wait. We waited, and nothing happened. Either they were not hungry, or it didn't look good to them.

Finally, I got disgusted. So I picked up a handful of the grass and whistled Duke over to me.

"Here, boy. Just like the stuff in Texas."

He gave me a doubtful look, but sampled a small nibble. He munched

thoughtfully. Then, glory be! He put his head down and went to it. One second later, the Kid's horse joined him.

"Kid," I said, "they will build a monument to you. In the shape of a beefsteak. Or a lamb chop."

It was worth a laugh, but riding back to the palace I thought that to these people who were scampering out of our way, it wouldn't be funny. Right now, they seemed more frightened of us than ever, even rushing indoors at sight of us. But I was sure we would be heroes when they got the good news.

When we got back to the palace, there was a guard waiting for us and we were hustled right into the King's presence. Esdrel, Purvo and the rest of the council were there. So was Marna. They looked at us.

"They ate it!" the Kid said.

The King nodded sourly. "I thought so. You are both under arrest!" To the guard: "Seize them!"

WE WERE too astonished to even put up a fight. Before we knew what hit us, our hands were tied behind our backs. We stood there like a couple of trussed chickens with our mouths hanging open.

"Why?" the Kid said at last, recovering slightly. He looked at Marna, and she turned her face away. "I demand to know why!"

"You know why!" Purvo shouted, his face burning with rage. He came up close and shook a finger in our faces. The Kid made a futile try at slipping his bonds, and when he didn't succeed, aimed a kick at Purvo.

"Look at them!" Purvo said to the King. "We were right to say they are of a warlike race. Their violence bubbles to the surface in an instant. Such as these would think nothing of butchering us all!"

He turned back to us. "So! Take

you back to your own planet, that is your desire. Then you could seize our ship and return with more of your murdering breed! Or if not that, then you would send us these beasts of yours to spread diseases to which you alone would be immune!"

"You're crazy!" the Kid said. "Stark, staring crazy!"

He turned to Marna. If she didn't believe him, nobody would. "You know that's not true."

For the first time, she looked square at him, and her pretty face was set hard. "Already our people are taken with violent illness. Some threaten open revolt."

"Enough," her father said to her. "Every case of this strange new disease has occurred where they have passed. Our physicians report the evidence is indisputable."

For the first time, Esdrel stepped to the fore. He looked very military in a fancy uniform, his speech was clipped and to the point. "We can keep order only by immediate action. The animals must be destroyed at once. Sentence must be pronounced on these two by tomorrow at the latest. Only that way will the people calm down."

"And I would suggest," added Purvo, "that some festive occasion be announced. The impending marriage of the Princess, for instance, would take their minds off recent untoward events."

This seemed like a clever idea to some of them, but I was hardly aware of what Purvo was saying. All I knew was they were going to destroy Duke, for no good reason at all. But one thing sure—if they did it, it would be over my dead body.

It was either my wrists or the ropes that were going to give, and it turned out to be the ropes. I let out a war whoop to end all war whoops and sailed into action.

The entire guard jumped me at once, and I had to carry half of them on my back to reach Esdrel. When I got to him, we all went down in a tangle. There was blood spilled, and not all of it was mine. In the end, though, they used *zen*. And that was curtains for me.

I CAME awake with a cold, wet rag on my face. The Kid pulled it away as I sat up and regarded me with an approving smile.

"It was a good fight while it lasted. You got nothing to be ashamed of."

"I ain't ashamed. But I'm still plenty mad."

"So'm I. And little good it'll do either of us." He shook his head. "Bill, it looks like we are on our last round-up."

"We been in tougher spots than this. We'll get out."

"I reckon not. Not this time."

He jerked his head toward the only window in the room we were in. I went over and looked out. There were no bars on the window, but it was a good hundred feet up and nothing but a sheer wall all the way to it.

From where I stood, I could see the palace off to the right. It was lit up like a Christmas tree, and was a beehive of activity, with uniformed men marching to and fro on both the sides I could see.

"It's been that way all evening," the Kid said. "Big excitement."

"Huh! Just a couple hours ago I thought all the commotion would be about us."

"Maybe it is."

"Yeah." I was plenty disgusted. "We were going to solve all their problems."

The Kid held up a warning hand. "Wait. I think someone's coming."

We kept quiet and a moment later there was a rattle at the door. I sneaked up close, figuring there'd

maybe be a chance to catch someone napping on the job.

But this was a real coop we were in. Only a little square opened, not enough to more than get my head through. Even that space had two bars across it. A man's face pressed up against the bars.

"You are allowed food," he said. "Do you want some?"

Neither the Kid nor me was hungry, but this was a chance for a little conversation. Maybe this fellow had some information on what our future would be.

"Big doings at the palace tonight," the Kid said, sociable-like.

"Yes."

And the guard started to close the little square. Before he could do so, however, the Kid went on: "Must be nice on a job like yours. You get to know the inside of everything that goes on." He chuckled. "I bet you know what's gonna happen before the King does, sometimes."

Well, I guess folks are the same all over. A little soft soap goes a long way. The face against the bars didn't exactly get friendly, but it relaxed a little.

"I was eight years in King Drugo's personal guard." His voice went sour. "Until the command was changed. Then, all new men." The little door banged shut.

"Well," the Kid said, "I guess there is one hand who don't like the foreman."

Meaning Esdrel, of course. At the moment, it didn't seem to do us much good, but we put it away for future reference. Meantime, we passed some weary waiting by watching the palace out of our window.

Still a lot of activity there. More, if anything, than there was before. The number of guards around the place now looked like they were expecting war any minute.

Just about then, our guard came back. The minute he opened the little door, we could see by his face he was excited over something. But all he did was shove two small containers of food at us and growl, "Here."

WE EACH took a container. The Kid took his after me, but did not take his hand away so the guard could close the door. He jerked his head toward the window.

"Guess the big announcement oughta come soon. Who's the lucky man, Esdrel or Purvo?"

The guard looked at him, and there was positively a glow on the man's face. "Neither!" he hissed. "Princess Marna says she will not marry either of them! And nothing anyone says can make her change her mind."

"Oh," the Kid said, "they'll change her mind all right." But he had a small glow of his own.

"Not that one," the guard chuckled. "She has the old royal blood."

We could see he was plenty fond of her. But it turned out to our disadvantage, because he threw us a very evil scowl.

"It is said she loved another. And that he betrayed her."

"Anyone who says that is a liar," the Kid told him.

That put an end to the conversation. We were left to sample the vegetable stew, which was not nearly as good as what the Harva served. We were getting fussy about jail food and left the stuff untouched.

It was still standing there when the guard returned. He opened the little door and yelled out to us: "Bring your containers to the door!"

I picked up the stuff and carried it over. One look and I saw something was very much amiss. He was an old man with rheumy eyes, but right now there was an excess of moisture.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"They have locked her up."

"Who locked who up?" The Kid came scooting over to hear what was going on.

"The military. They say the people demand a younger and stronger man to lead us. When the Princess refused to marry, the commander announced that the council would take over the rule."

"It's a dirty plot!" the Kid yelled. He was really wilder than I had ever seen him. "What've they done with her?"

"She is confined to her own quarters. And the King to his. I don't think they will dare harm either of them."

"Those skunks'll do anything they think they can get away with," the Kid said. "I had them figured for tin-horns the minute I saw them, and now I know what their game is."

"No. They would never harm her," our guard insisted. "We would never let them."

"You and who else?" I asked.

That stumped him. All of a sudden, he realized that except for him and maybe a few old timers, the rest of them would go along with Esdrel. Nobody was going to buck the top dog.

"If I could only get out of here!" the Kid said, pounding his fist into his palm. "I'd fix them good." He got close to the bars and whispered fiercely: "You wouldn't want the Princess to die, would you?"

"I would die first myself." And he meant it.

"Then help us get out of here!"

The old man stared at him. "You are the one she is said to love. I can see you love her, too."

"Then open the door," the Kid begged.

"No. No, it is impossible. Even if I let you out, you could not escape. There are a hundred armed men below."

"I don't care if there's a thousand men," the Kid snarled.

"Wait a minute," I interrupted. "We won't do her no good if we get ourselves killed."

I went back to the window and took another look. With clouds over the whole sky, it was plenty dark outside. Now that night had fallen, I couldn't even see the side of the building twenty feet below.

"If you can't go through them, go around them," I quoted. "Maybe our pard here could get us a long enough rope to do the trick."

"A rope?" the old man said. "How long would it have to be?"

"From here to the ground," the Kid said. "And strong enough to hold a man's weight."

"There is rope in the storeroom," our guard said. "And the man who has the key served in the King's retinue with me. It will not take long."

IT TOOK long enough. The Kid and me had our fingernails chewed down to the shoulder by the time the knock came at the door. We both rushed at it.

"Quickly, now," the old man said. And from under his coat, he started paying out a long coil. It was good heavy rope, and plenty strong. The Kid and me reeled it in.

"Your old pal came through," I gloated.

"He refused. I had to take the key from him."

Only then did I notice the thin trickle of blood down the side of the old man's face. He would never convince anyone his pal fell down a flight of stairs.

"It doesn't matter," he said. "And there will be others who remember the old days and remain loyal. If you get through, tell the King and the Princess that."

With that, he left. The Kid and

me wasted no more time in idle talk. We got over to the window and started letting down rope.

There was more than enough. The old man had played it safe and brought a good two hundred feet. As soon as the end hit ground, we let the rest go fast until we had only enough to knot around the door handle.

Then, the Kid went out the window. I followed right after, and we got down hand over hand. It was a fast hundred feet, and my palms were blistered when we hit bottom.

For an instant, we froze. But there was no sound except for voices that drifted around from the other side of the building. I got out a knife and sliced off rope as high over my head as I could reach. It took only another minute to make a running knot and coil it.

"What's that for?" the Kid whispered.

"I don't know yet. Let's go," I said.

We were off at a dog trot. As dark as the night was, we were going to be safe for a while. We knew where the palace was, and if we met anyone on the way, they wouldn't even be able to see our faces.

But that was a problem which didn't arise. Until we reached the palace grounds, we didn't meet a soul.

Then our troubles really began.

THE PLACE was literally crawling with Esdrel's men. There were lights all over, clear out into the gardens, and wherever we looked we saw uniforms.

The Kid and me lay in some low shrubbery across from the main entrance hall and did some fancy cussing. But that didn't get us any closer.

"We got one chance," the Kid ventured at last.

"Grow wings?"

He rightly disregarded that. "Es-

drel and Purvo ain't figuring on anyone getting in. They're just worried about the King or Marna getting out. Most of the men are busy watching the palace."

I saw what he meant. Except for an occasional glance around, everyone had his eyes fixed on the big building.

"Let's get around through the gardens," the Kid said.

We got up and scooted through the darkness until we were behind the big garden wall. The wall was a good ten feet high, and without any chinks that I could see.

The Kid made a stirrup of his hands, and then I caught on. I put a foot in and he heaved while I jumped on my other leg. I just managed to get my fingertips on top, but that was enough. In a second, I was lying flat on my stomach up there and reaching down a hand to the Kid.

We dropped over behind a clump of small trees. From there, we eased along the meandering paths toward the slowly brightening lights ahead. Where the path forked and came to an end by circling a little ring of pansy-like flowers, we stopped dead. It was as far as we could go.

From here to the palace, there were two guards patrolling, walking back and forth so their paths crisscrossed.

We were safe in the shadows now, but five feet ahead there was light. And on that hard surface, we were bound to make some noise. But now I knew why I had brought the rope along. The Kid and I pulled back a little.

"If it was cows, I'd take the chance," I said. "This way—"

"What've we got to lose?" the Kid came back. "Gimme that rope."

I handed it over and he shook out a small loop and got it whirling around his head. It would be a long toss, and there was only the one in-

stant when the two guards met. Many was the time the Kid had roped from a moving horse to a racing target, and no bigger a target, but this time it counted more.

The guards made their turn, and I held my breath. Five paces, ten paces, and they were almost close enough to shake hands.

Overhead, a long thin line snaked out, hesitated like a bird about to settle, and dropped. The Kid yanked hard.

And two men were wearing a rope collar! Screams died aborning as the Kid and me hauled in slack. Like two struggling fish, we reeled them in. Their tongues were hanging out when we deposited them in the bed of flowers.

FIVE MINUTES later, there were two guards again, the same uniforms and same military bearing. A close inspection would show up the difference in men, but the Kid and me prayed we wouldn't be inspected. We took our paces and came together.

"Marna's rooms are right off the corridor that leads to that balcony there," the Kid said.

The balcony was about as high as the garden wall. We looked it over and it seemed possible.

"I'll give you the lift," I said. "And cover you till you see if the coast is clear."

In no time at all, the Kid was lying flat up there on the balcony and peeping through the door which opened on it. He gave me the high sign and with his assistance, I joined him.

"Second door on the left," he said.

We scooted down there, and the Kid tried the door. Locked. He rapped gently several times. When nobody answered, it began to look like the old guard had given us a bum steer. But the Kid was afraid to rap too

loud.

I eased down to where the corridor turned off and peeked around the corner. Nobody in sight. "Louder," I whispered.

The Kid rapped good and hard this time, and after a few seconds, a voice wanted to know who was there.

"A message from the King," the Kid said.

The door opened a crack and the Kid shoved. I came in right on his heels. There was an old lady, some sort of personal attendant, and she opened her mouth to scream. The Kid clamped a hand over it. I kicked the door shut behind us.

"What is it?" a voice called from the next room.

We answered that one by walking right in. Marna took one look at the Kid, and there was no question why she turned down Purvo and Esdrel. She flew to the Kid's arms and for a minute they were busy kissing and hugging.

"Save that for later," I finally had to say. "We better get while the getting is good."

"But..." she stammered, still befuddled. "Wait. My father!"

"Where is he?"

"Through the next suite. There are connecting doors."

The Kid already had her arm and was towing her along. We went through a little door and into a room that was big enough to stage a rodeo in. Marna's mother must've had that suite, because the decoration was the kind a woman would like. We made it over to the opposite door.

"Better go in alone," the Kid said to Marna. "In case anyone is there."

She knocked while we ducked behind a large couch. "Father, it's Marna!"

We heard the door open. There were a few whispered words. Then Marna stuck her head over the top

of the couch. "It's all right."

King Drugo was a much bewildered man when he saw us. He tried to keep on an even keel and just couldn't make it.

"Never mind the questions," I said.

"No," he said. "How you managed to get here, I can't imagine. But you will never persuade me to leave here with you."

"Man," the Kid said in exasperation. "Don't tell me you still suspect us!"

"I—" He stopped abruptly. It was plain there was still some doubt in his mind. But it was not completely that which held him back. He might be old; he might be losing his grip; but yet he was still a King.

"No. My duty to my people is to remain here. At least as a symbol, if nothing more."

"But a dead King isn't even a symbol," the Kid told him. "And if you stay, your life ain't worth a plugged nickel. Or Marna's either."

"I cannot quite believe that," King Drugo said.

The Kid was about to give him a further argument. He never got to do it. For just at that moment, another voice entered our conversation.

"How charming a scene," the voice said. "So sorry to interrupt."

WE HAD been so busy trying to convince the King, that we had not heard the door open. Being a royal door, it was probably well greased anyhow. But be that as it may, here we were with our faces hanging out while our friends Purvo and Esdrel marched into the room.

"Extra keys," Purvo explained, "are easy to make. Don't move, please."

He waved a shiny stick at us. Esdrel waved another. Both were slightly larger than any I had heretofore seen around. It looked like they could

deliver a nasty shock.

"Your friends here happened to be almost correct in their estimate of our intentions," Esdrel told the King. "We have come here to deliver an ultimatum. Either the Princess marries Purvo or myself, or your positions will be precarious, to say the least."

"Especially in view of the fact you have been found conspiring with enemies of the realm," Purvo added. "How they were able to escape, I don't know. But it will be assumed it was with your connivance."

"Nothing you can do will force me to marry either of you," Marna said stoutly.

"Nothing we can do, perhaps," Purvo said. "But perhaps someone else could persuade you."

He looked square at the King. Marna looked at her father, too, and I realized that Purvo knew this girl pretty well. If her father gave the word, my guess was that she would obey. With her father hesitating, it was a tense moment.

"Look," I interrupted. "If they thought their position was so solid, they wouldn't need Marna. I happen to believe in a fate worse than death. If Marna was my daughter, I'd see her dead before she married either of these skunks."

"I don't know," the King said miserably. He had been under terrific pressure and was beginning to crack.

"Before you make up your mind," the Kid put in, "I'd like to give you some lowdown, Your Majesty. You've been taken for a ride."

"A—?"

"I mean, the whole deal smells. I mean, the deck was stacked. In other words, the whole business about the Harva is a phony. It's the old trick of stirring up the Indians."

Marna and her father thought he had gone crazy. They were staring at him.

The Kid went on: "Listen, we saw the Harva. Most of them were carrying clubs and slingshots. They wouldn't even begin to know how to make these shiny sticks, much less something that could bring down a space ship. Somebody supplied them with weapons and stirred them up. And that somebody was a pair of your own Basra."

Marna's eyes popped with excitement. She had just seen the light. "Father, they are right! I, too, saw the Harva."

"Sure," the Kid snorted. "With the food shortage, all it took was another threat to put the military in the driver's seat."

The King had only to take a look at Esdrel and Purvo to see we had them dead to rights. However, as Esdrel pointed out, the knowledge wouldn't do us any good.

"Very clever. But we are in the driver's seat. And now, Your Majesty, if you please, your answer."

I knew how I'd feel if I was in King Drugo's shoes. It was pretty hard for a man to sentence his daughter to death. But it looked like that was exactly what he intended to do. His jaw jutted out and his head was high.

However, Marna proceeded to throw in a small bombshell. "I will marry one of you," she announced calmly. "Either of you. But on only one condition: You must return these two men to their own planet. Unharmed."

It took us all by surprise, but Esdrel and Purvo recovered fast. They tossed a glance back and forth. Between Venus and Earth, a good many things can happen.

"Agreed," they said in one breath.

And for just that instant, they took their eyes off us. It was just long enough.

The Kid had been edging over lit-

tle by little until he was leaning against a small table. On the table, there was a bust of the King. Now, with one sweeping motion, the Kid picked up the bust and heaved it. It landed smack against the side of Purvo's head and sent him reeling into Esdrel.

"Run!" the Kid yelled.

THERE WAS only one place to run, and that was the next suite. The King and Marna and the Kid and me were in there in a flash. I was the last one in, and I slammed the door as we went through. In another second, we were in Marna's suite.

"Can you lock this from inside?" the Kid asked.

Marna nodded. She shot a bolt over, and we were locked in safely. But it looked like this safety would be of short duration. We could already hear shouts through the walls.

"We can never escape," the King mourned.

It looked like he was right. About all I could see was for us to make it as tough as possible for them once they broke in. I picked up a heavy chair and proceeded to knock off a leg.

"If I only understood *zen*," I said, "they would be sorry they ever got to me."

"But you can resist it," Marna said. "It is only a mental power, much like hypnotism. If you ever set your will against it, it cannot harm you."

"Thanks," I said. "There are going to be some skulls cracked."

"No, there aren't," the Kid overruled. "We're getting out." He looked at Marna. "Do you know where they've put our guns? If we had those, we could make it mighty hot for Esdrel and his men."

"Your weapons are still on the

ship," she said. "But that is in a hangar at the edge of the city. We can never reach it."

"Not on foot," the Kid agreed. "But maybe we won't have to walk."

And with that, he was out on her own little balcony. He lifted his head, put two fingers in his mouth, and let out a shrill whistle.

My heart leaped. One chance in a million, but maybe we would get that chance. I rushed out beside him and let loose with a whistle of my own. Once more we tried it.

And then, the sweetest sound a man ever heard! The wild neighs of a pair of Texas cow ponies! The sound was not close, but at least they were alive. And they heard us!

"Oh, you Duke," I whispered. And I whistled again.

Next time, the neighing was closer. There were also shouts now. I kept my fingers in my mouth and whistled until my ears rang.

There was nothing in the world could stop them now. Those little sticks might paralyze a man temporarily, but a horse was bigger than a man.

They had been stabled all the way around the other side, in an unused guest house set back in a sort of park. At the rate they were going, it wouldn't take them very long to get here.

"We better get down off this balcony," I said.

The Kid went down first, and I handed Marna down to him. Then King Drugo followed. Last of all, me. The four of us huddled close to the vine-covered wall, knowing that pretty soon there would be men scooting around the corner of the palace.

As a matter of fact, we could already hear shouting. I let out a last desperate whistle. So did the Kid. A minute later, there were screams of fear mingled with the shouts.

BOTH HORSES came around the turn like they were after a couple of scared mavericks. They were still saddled, the Kid and me having been nabbed before we could get the saddles off.

"Here, Duke!" I called. They wheeled toward us and pulled up.

"You first," the Kid said.

The Princess was scared stiff, but the Kid just picked her up and threw her aboard. I got the King aboard Duke and hopped up behind him. We told them both to hold on to the pom-poms for dear life.

That was all the time we had because the first of Esdrel's men were already coming our way. Others followed right on their heels. I started to head Duke around, but the Kid stopped me.

"We'll never get over the wall."

There was nothing to do but to go through them. At first, I thought they were going to try to stop us bodily, but they had already had a taste of flying hoofs and had no appetite for more.

They split up and started pointing their sticks. But the Kid and I fooled them. Instead of going down the middle, we headed straight for the larger group on our right.

Maybe braver men might have stood their ground. But these had little experience with horses, and to them it must have seemed like two express trains bearing down.

They dropped their stocks and ran, and we kept right on going. The rest didn't even have time to aim properly before we were past them.

All the lights were now a help, rather than a hindrance. We could at least see where we were going, and there was no danger of either horse stepping into a hole.

The closest palace gates were a hundred yards away, and we shot for those. Someone with presence of mind

yelled a command to close the gates, and the nearest squad made a rush to obey.

It was a good race. I was fanning Duke's flank and I loosed the skin off two knuckles as we skimmed through. Just that close, but we made it.

From there on, it was a jaunt through darkness. We could barely see the buildings along the streets. But, fortunately, the streets were almost bare of citizens, except for a few night owls. Those got out of our way as if we were the devil himself.

With Marna shouting directions, it looked like we wouldn't have any more trouble. I started to relax. It turned out I was a little premature. Esdrel and Purvo weren't licked yet.

I had forgotten completely about the little ship King Drugo used to haul us out to the barren countryside. Now, just when we were within sight of the big space ship's hangar, we heard a roar behind us.

How the horses made it, I'll never know. They had been toting twice their usual cargo, and going at a pace no horse can stand for long. But from somewhere, they drew on a reserve.

WE SLID through the hangar doors just as the ship above us glided in for a landing, trying to cut us off. I could feel the breeze as the pilot made a sharp turn to avoid smashing into the hangar.

The Kid was off first, and he grabbed one of the big doors and swung it shut. I got the one on my side and did the same.

Three guards who had been stationed in the hangar to protect the ship showed up just then. But they were no problem. One look at the horses and they didn't know whether to faint or run. Not having anywhere they could run, they did the next thing to fainting. They threw up their

hands and got out of the guard business.

Not wanting to take a chance on their loyalty to King Drugo, which they protested at the top of their lungs, we herded them into one of the smaller rooms on the ship and locked the door. Then, under Marna's guidance, we ferreted out the locker where our guns were put.

It took only one good kick to break the lock, and then I had the substantial feel of a rifle in my hands. The Kid and me buckled on our gunbelts and checked to make sure the guns were still loaded.

That was all the time we had, because there was already a call to surrender. The Kid and I made the appropriate noises in reply.

"Do you savvy these controls?" I asked the Princess. "We can outrun that little ship out there easy."

"I don't," she said. "But even if I did, how could we get it into the air?"

Which was a fair enough question, the doors being closed and there being a roof on the hangar. All of us had pretty sour faces. We were in a trap of our own making.

"Well," the Kid said, "they'll at least get a run for their money. Before I cash my chips, some of those coyotes are gonna be digesting lead."

I gave the Winchester a pat. "When you see the whites of their eyes, pardner," I said.

We got out of the ship and into the hangar again. The back of the place was solid, but up front there were a couple of windows. I poked the rifle barrel through one while the Kid stationed himself at the other. There were lights on outside and someone spotted us.

"Surrender!" came a shout.

The little ship was standing about fifty yards away, with a group of men in front of it. It was from there

the shout came. I looked at the Kid.

"Let them get a little closer," he said.

For a minute, I had hopes we could get them all. But the hopes were dashed as reinforcements arrived. We watched as a half dozen of them started marching forward.

"Look out!" the Princess said. "They are using zen."

I felt the thing pluck at my brain. But now I knew what it was and how it worked, I discovered I could fight it off. All I had to do was keep saying no, no, no, no. To myself, of course.

By this time, the six men were within twenty-five yards and were starting to point their little sticks. "Here goes," I said.

Three of them were down before they realized what the noise was all about. The Kid picked off the other three as they turned to run.

All the rest, and there were several hundred now, made a quick dash for any cover available. This turn of events was something to talk over, and they were talking plenty. My guess was that Esdrel was having his troubles convincing the men that it was better to be a dead hero than a live coward.

ESDREL MUST have been a pretty good persuader. It took just a little while and a whole covey of them busted out and started moving in. They came from all angles, making it as hard as possible.

"You better start first," the Kid said to me. "Pick off the ones on the side."

I opened up. At this distance, the rifle did a fine job where most of the Kid's shots would be wasted. I nailed three of them, taking it slow. Then, as they got closer, I kept triggering as fast as I could.

They must have figured the Kid

had run out of ammunition, because all of them swung over on his side. But by then they were within easy range.

The Kid missed his first, but the next five fell dead in their tracks. He emptied the other gun, and then stepped aside to reload while I took over at his window.

I guessed some of them could have made it. But they decided not to try. They broke and ran, and I for one was just as happy. The rifle was getting too hot to hold. Also, I discovered that the pocketful of bullets I had was now reduced to seven or eight.

While I loaded up, the Kid gave me some more bad news. "I'm running low on lead. How you doing?"

I told him and he shook his head. "If Esdrel is half the general that Sitting Bull was, our scalps are as good as lifted."

"He ain't the kind to quit trying," I said sourly. Then, I looked out of my window. "Hey!"

"What is it?" the Kid asked.

"I'm not sure. Either the city's burning or something's going on."

All three of them came over for a look-see. It was plain enough that the light I had seen was not the regular sort they use for illumination. This light was flickering, not steady.

"Torchlight," the Kid guessed. He looked at the King and Marna. "They wouldn't be having some kind of parade, would they?"

"No," said the King. "Esdrel and Purvo are not the type to do anything as premature as that."

"Well," I told him, "there is certainly more than one toothpick burning there."

"It must be a demonstration of some kind," the King opined. "But why, I cannot guess."

The Kid rolled a thought or two around in his head. "Your Majesty,

how would you say your people felt about you?"

King Drugo shrugged. From his expression, it was plain he thought his subjects could take him or leave him be. But Marna felt different.

"Our people love my father. They know that our troubles are not of his making. As Esdrel and Purvo themselves know, even a military coup might not succeed unless I married one of them."

"That's about the way I had it figured," the Kid said. "Well, all those loyal subjects sure ain't doing any good way over there. Reckon someone better get over and tell them where the game is being held."

"Right!" I said. "If you'll just get that door open, I'll see what old Duke and me can do."

"Reckon not. You outweigh me twenty pounds, and the condition our horses are in, that would make a difference."

I tried to argue. After all, what did I have to lose? If I got knocked off on the way, there was still a chance the Kid and Marna and the King could be saved.

But the Kid was stubborn. It was no use. When Marna saw what he meant to do, she got plenty excited, but the Kid just shook her off. "Open up!" he called.

I opened up and he went through like a bolt of greased lightning. By the time I got the door shut and got back to the window, he was swinging wide around Esdrel's ship.

HIS MOVE caught Esdrel by surprise, but not for long. The little ship took off like a scared rabbit, and the Kid's lead was going to be cut down plenty.

Once in the city proper, he'd have a chance. He knew enough to stay close to building walls where they couldn't get down to reach him. But

the odds were still bad enough.

"Nothing to do now but wait," I said as cheerfully as I could.

For a while, they let us wait. We had thrown them off balance and it seemed they had clean forgotten about us. But not for long. Either Purvo or Esdrel was still out there, and whichever it was realized that the Princess and her father were still in the hangar.

And now there was only me to buck.

It took quite a while, but eventually they made their move. "They are coming," Marna called from the other window.

I took a gander. Sure enough, they were coming. They were spread all over the landscape, and there were enough so I knew I didn't have a chance to get them all.

Still, I did my best. The rifle got its share, and then it was empty. I picked up the Kid's guns, which he had left behind, and got to work with those.

There were still five or six shots in each when the first wave of uniformed men got close to the doors. I couldn't even reach them from where I stood now.

"Get back!" I yelled to Marna and her father.

They ducked back close to the big ship, and I moved with them until I was about fifteen feet from the doors. Then I stood and waited.

The first ones in got it and a few more piled over them. It was quite a tangle, which I took as much advantage of as possible. But before I knew it, my guns were clicking on empty chambers. I dropped them and scooped up the rifle, which was at my feet.

I don't know what I yelled as I charged. Maybe it was, "Remember the Alamo!" Anyway, I was yelling at the top of my lungs. It was going

to be a loud fight as well as a good one.

The carnage was frightful. I swung about me lustily, and if I was no Samson, neither was I swinging the jawbone of an ass. A rifle carries a lot of weight, even empty.

Eventually, though, they got to me. One of the paralyzing rays put my right hand out of whack. Then someone kicked me in the belly and doubled me over. They all took turns after that. I was still swinging as I started a deep dive into a blood-red haze.

And I was still swinging as I came out of it. For suddenly there was nothing for me to swing at! I could see again, and the only opposition in front of me was that which I had already disposed of.

There was the drumming of hoofs close by. I heard a shout. "Bill!"

"Kid!" I yelled back.

The next thing I knew, he almost rode over me.

BEHIND HIM the plain was lit up by an advancing line of flame. It was not very close yet, but it was moving plenty fast for men on foot.

The military was on the run. They had had enough fight to fill their bellies for many a day, and had no desire to take on the entire population of Basrata. Which, from the number of torches, was what approached us.

We watched, me leaning dazedly on the rifle barrel; the Kid with his arm around Marna; and the King crying tears of joy.

By now, the torches were close. And carrying the first one was none other than the old guard who had helped us escape. He got a look at King Drugo and let out a shout of joy.

"Luck!" the Kid said. "I had plenty of it! That danged ship almost got me right out in the middle of the main plaza. But I had to duck

around a monument, and they came in too close. Next thing I knew, it was flat as a pancake in the street."

"You couldn't have made that maneuver on purpose," I said.

"Maybe," he grinned. "But running into the old guard was pure luck, all right. If not for him, the mob'd have torn me to bits."

"What about Purvo and Esdrel?"

"Must be somewheres out there," he said. "They couldn't possibly get around that mob."

We saw now that the advancing arc of angry citizens was sweeping up the military as it advanced. And right out in front of the running soldiery were none other than our two pals. They had a good lead, though.

"This is for me," I grinned.

It was a thrill I had not known in a long time, riding a good horse with a lariat swinging overhead. I bore down on them and they didn't see me coming.

"Yahoo!" I yelled, just to have the fun of not catching them unawares.

The rope snaked out and settled over them. Like he had been trained to do, Duke stopped dead. Purvo and Esdrel landed flat on their faces.

I dragged them back that way. The Kid had still got his arms around Marna, and the King was smiling now, getting a real kick out of seeing them take the ride.

"Roped and delivered, Your Majesty," I said. "And ready for the branding. And as for getting some young blood in the royal family, I'd say your worries are over, there, too."

He grinned happily, and it was plain the Kid and Marna had his blessing.

"Listen, Bill," the Kid said. "We'll take a trip back for a couple of good bulls and plenty of heifers. In a few years, we'll have more cattle here than on the Panhandle. I'm going to need a right hand man to help. What do

you say?"

"You will find a wife here on Venus," Marna put in. "You will be happy here."

"No go," I said. "Thanks for the offer, but I guess not. Women just ain't for me. And I reckon that Montana country will do me as well as any. I wouldn't ever feel at home here."

They tried to make me change my mind, but it was no use.

"Kid, as far as you're concerned, you'd be crazy to go back. We been the best of partners, but I just can't see staying on."

And that was the way it was. He took the ride down with me and we left the ship in a well hidden clearing while we rounded up sufficient stock to get them started on Venus.

Then we shook hands and said goodbye. Marna kissed me, and it was the last time I was ever kissed by a woman. I watched them take off.

THAT WAS a good many years ago.

I stuck it out up here in Montana country and I didn't do too bad. I've had just about everything a man could want out of life.

Everything except a good wife.

There have been plenty of nights when I've sat on my porch and looked up at a bright planet. Maybe if I'd stayed, I'd have had the good wife too. I doubt it though. The years haven't improved my appearance any, and have certainly done my disposition no good.

But I've often wondered about the Kid and Marna. I figured his cattle scheme must have worked, or he probably would have been back. But who knew how well? Maybe there were other troubles. There usually are.

So when the space ships started coming, and the papers were full of them, I wondered some more. When others pooh-poohed the notion of

space ships, I kept my mouth shut. If those ships were from Venus, I knew I'd be hearing from the Kid sooner or later. He knew just about where I'd be.

And it was on a cool summer night not long ago that I found out for sure.

I was sitting in my softest chair, reading a paper. Outside, the moon was bright. I could hear my herd lowing not far off. Suddenly, there was a knock at the door.

"Come in!" I yelled.

There were two of them who stepped inside. A fellow and a girl. Both of them were wearing wide hats and cowboy dress. The fellow was also packing two guns, something you don't see much any more outside of movies. Then I looked at their faces.

"Kid! Marna!"

Only it wasn't them. This couple was too young. But except for that, they were the spit and image of the Kid and Marna.

"You are Yucca Bill?" the boy said.

"I am," said I.

He stepped forward to shake my hand. "The Brazos Kid is my father," he told me. "And this is my sister Marna."

"If your ma had had a sister like you, I'd still be on Venus," I told her.

That got us off on the right foot, and we had a great to-do. The Kid is getting on in years, naturally, but is otherwise fine. The space ships have been from Venus, all right.

"How come?" I asked. "Running into more trouble? Cattle dying of hoof and mouth disease?"

"On the contrary," Kid Jr. allowed. "They have fared so well, that we

have an overabundance of them. That is the reason for this trip. My father sent us to see if we could not arrange to do some trading with Earth."

I SHOOK MY head sadly. "Son, I hate to disillusion your old man. But this planet ain't much the way he left it. We've had two world wars since I got back, and we may be readying for another. Folks have got cusseder and cusseder. You go back and tell your pop to keep as far away from here as possible. Got that?"

"I have," he said. "I will convey your message to him. Is there anything else?"

"Yes. You're toting a lot of iron there. Are you much good?"

He slapped his thigh, and I was looking into two barrels. He was the Kid's son, all right.

"He is also the best horseman on Venus," his sister said proudly.

I beamed at them. "What's your horse's name?" I asked.

"Duke," he said. "It is the law that all horses on Venus must be called Duke."

Well, ain't that something? In all my life, I had never heard anything which made me happier.

I shook hands with the boy and kissed his sister goodbye and watched them walk out into the night. A little later, a silver ship dipped low over the house and was gone.

I had trouble seeing it, because my eyes were full of tears. I'll never forget the Kid. And I know now he's never forgotten me.

THE END

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THEY WHO SLEEP

By U. E. Thiessen



Screaming in rage they swarmed upon the Earthman who had defiled their princess

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For a thousand centuries this lovely girl lay sleeping. What could wake her in time to save Herrick from the fanatical priests?

IT MIGHT HAVE been only one of the shifting shadows that made Herrick suspicious of ambush. His boots shuffled through the red Martian sand in a little whispering sound of discouragement, and his mind was obscured by a bleak haze of despair. Yet habit was strong in

him, and as the shadow shifted near his space ship, his mind came awake, planning with the catlike and instinctive swiftness that had kept him alive in the far corners of the galaxy. Someone was waiting for him there, perhaps one of the Jaxies, the leather skinned natives with the strange body



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chemistry, perhaps an Earthman.

At any rate, the watcher skulked near the ship's door. Herrick was already well within range of a gun. That meant the watcher preferred quietness, would probably strike with a knife or *ogan*, a sack filled with the red Martian sand.

He walked on steadily, his mind locating the handle of his Beta gun, so that when the time came to seize the weapon he would be sure and swift. He had almost reached the door, was almost within reach when he stopped, snapped his fingers, as if he had forgotten something, and turned in two quick steps to go around to the opposite side of the ship.

And once around, he ran as dead-light and silent as a sandcat, coming upon the shadow by the door from behind, and jabbing the nose of his Beta gun into that shadow until it met surprised and quivering flesh.

"I'll shoot." His voice carried a deadly certainty. "Drop your weapon and step out into the moonlight."

His visitor stepped out. He was small, almost small enough to be one of the Jaxies, but as he stepped out into the saffron light of the twin Martian moons, he was revealed as an Earthman. His weapon, a long-bladed knife, was still in the sheath attached to his belt.

The Earthman said, "You've got me wrong, Herrick. I wanted to do you a favor." He smiled, and his tiny pointed teeth shone in the moonlight.

"So you wait in the shadows with a long-bladed knife!" Herrick's voice revealed the harsh amusement in his mind. "Okay, tell me about this favor. Tell me how you know my name. Talk!" He twisted the gun into the little man's flesh.

Everyone knows you seek for the woman who sleeps."

"Go on," Herrick said harshly.

"I can take you there."

For an instant, hope flared fiercely in Herrick's mind, and then memory plunged him back into despair. There had been others who knew the legend, others who could find the woman who slept, others who sought nothing more than a few taels of Martian silver, and the chance to knife him in the back for his gun and ship.

The little man fumbled at his belt, and the belt knife and sheath dropped to the sand. "My name is Covan," he said. "Take the gun out of my side, and we'll talk about the treasure."

"The treasure?"

"Of course. The treasure in the crypt with the woman who sleeps. You'll be after that. Well, I'll guide you there. But it will cost you ten thousand taels, and half of what you realize on the contents of the crypt."

Herrick had heard tales of Covan. The little man was a sort of desert beachcomber, in and out of trouble with the police. A dry bitterness welled in him. "There is no treasure. It is only a trick to cheat me of ten thousand taels."

The bitterness in his mind flamed to anger. He had been deceived so often. He raised his hand and slashed it across Covan's face, so that the little man stumbled and threw his arm up in protection. Herrick's voice roared out, laden with the anger of a hundred disappointments. "There is no treasure—admit it. There is no treasure!"

"There is no treasure." Covan echoed shrilly. "It was only a trick."

"And there is no crypt, no woman who sleeps! It is but a legend, an idol in the minds of the Jaxies."

THE VISITOR'S eyes glittered at Herrick. "Everyone knows you.

COVAN SAID quietly, "There is a crypt and a woman who lies

there, a woman more beautiful than your dreams. And now, I will go."

Herrick lashed out with his voice: "You will not go. You will show me this crypt."

Covan screamed back at him, "My price is still ten thousand taels!"

Herrick looked along the sights of his Beta gun. The moonlight glinted off the weapon and traced the hard line of his cheek. "You will show me the crypt. And if you have told me the truth, you shall have one thousand taels. Now get in the ship."

Covan's moods seemed as changeable and elusive as mercury. "Fair enough," he agreed, and he smiled as he crawled into the ship, his little pointed teeth revealing some secret amusement. Herrick followed him, and blasted off. The ship leaped into the air above the moonlit sand.

FLYING OVER the raw and barren desolation of the Martian badlands, Herrick's mind wrestled with this development.

Covan seemed entirely quiet and subdued in the ship, speaking only now and then, to correct the course, or bending to peer down at the moonlit landscape below. He looked up from one of these inspections to command, "Better swing a couple more degrees right." He looked at Herrick then, his first direct glance since they had embarked. "You're a doctor, aren't you?"

"I'm a fellow of the Terran Medical Research Center."

"Is that why you want to find the woman who sleeps, for medical study?"

"Yes."

"You figure if you can understand how it's done, the secret will be worth a fortune." The little man's face was shrewd in the moonlight.

Herrick said tautly, "There are some things more important than money. But you wouldn't understand

that." His words plunged his memory back, sent his mind whirling over his whole work with catalepsy. The subject had been one which had interested Herrick's father, from the discovery of toads trapped for centuries in rock enclosures. These creatures were alive, Herrick's father maintained, by reason of a self-induced catalepsy.

And if he had been successful, he might have saved his own life. Herrick felt his flesh creep as he thought of that. The cure for the disease from which Herrick's father had died had been found less than a month after his death. If he could only have waited...

Since then, Herrick had found more, enough to believe as his father had. Some fossilized animals on Venus gave him a start. Later, he had found legends and ancient writing on Mars. He was on the trail of something big.

Covan said, "We're getting close to the spot where we should land."

HERRICK JERKED his attention to the landscape below. By day, those red and twisted rocks were an implacable desert furnace. Now at night, under the saffron moon, they were weird and silent, and only now and then the hot breath from some rock, still cooling, breathed a hint of the day gone by.

"Set her down there." Covan gestured, and Herrick dropped the ship on a red sandstone area, fairly flat in topography.

Covan said, "We won't need much water, only our canteens. There's a stream in the crypt."

Herrick looked at him keenly. There were two things essential to life on the desert. Water and salt. By day, the dry heat of the desert wrung a man like a sponge. He said, "Perhaps you are right, but we'll take a five-gallon drum. We can take turns carrying it. And get one of those tins

of salt tablets."

Covan shrugged. "Okay. Get out and I'll hand the stuff to you."

A fierce excitement flared in Herrick's mind. Yet, he was not so excited that he forgot to remove the ignition key from the ship. He had no desire to be left here on the desert, watching Covan fly off with the ship. He sprang down and stood for an instant, looking around, hearing the silence that pressed in upon him from the twisted hills, now that the ship was stopped.

Covan's shriek cut that silence. He came out of the ship, slamming the door behind him, without water, without salt, crying, "Look out, she's afire!"

Herrick whirled, his mind sick with fear. The orange brightness of flame showed inside the windows, and he seized the door handle and jerked it open.

Flame gulfed out upon him. The open door completed a draft through the ship, and it flared like tinder. He had never seen a ship burn so wildly.

He slammed the door, staggering back with singed eyebrows. He screamed at the little man, "Run! She may blow up!"

They ran into that weird landscape, over rock whose latent heat still boiled to the surface. They flung themselves behind a rock outcrop, hugging that red sandstone close, and heard the plane go in a roaring explosion that sent fragments whistling over their heads.

And then there was silence. The silence of the night pressed in upon them, as quiet as deafness, and the red rocks lay mocking them in the quietness.

Covan said, "There's water in the crypt. Come on."

They set out, walking, their boots sending shuffling echoes that rose and died of loneliness under the twin

moons.

The idea struck Herrick with the force of a delayed blow. He seized Covan's shoulder, spun him and screamed at him.

"You dropped an incendiary! That's why she burned like that."

"Don't be a fool." Covan gestured. "The entrance to the crypt is just beyond that rock."

They went on. There was nothing else Herrick could do.

THE SUN was barely coming up as they rounded the rock Covan indicated, and the disbelief that had lain like a canker in Herrick's mind vanished. For before them was an entrance made by some skilled artisan.

The entrance was horizontal, thrust into the side of one of the sandstone cliffs. There was no ornamentation, only the outlines of a door, as mathematically regular as an architect's drawing, with a stone slab blocking the entrance.

Covan said, "It's counterbalanced; push on through."

Herrick pushed and the door swung easily. He held it open and said quietly, "I'll follow you."

Covan grinned his sharp-toothed grin. "You still don't trust me. How about my thousand taels? I don't trust you either."

Herrick looked at him with distaste. "I believe you'd shoot your brother for ten taels." He touched the Beta gun in his holster and said harshly, "I have the money in my pocket. But you'll never see it until you show me the woman."

"Come on then." Covan brushed past him and drew a tiny pencil-shaped flashlight from his pocket. He snapped the switch, and a beam of light lit up the rock tunnel ahead.

Herrick released the door and they moved on. If the desert had been silent before, the tunnel was tomblike

now, and beyond the circle of light of the flashlight, the tunnel was as mysterious as velvet.

The tunnel led down underneath the surface. As they descended, the rock began to lose its heat, and faintly, in the silence, the gurgling of water could be heard.

Covan stopped, as alert as a listening dog. "Thought I heard a Jaxie," he explained. "No need to tell you this is forbidden territory. Taboo, and all that."

Herrick could well imagine. The odd mixture of superstition and religion that actuated the Jaxies was the sort of thing that could be easily violated. Many an Earthman had died with a Jaxie spear through his lungs from some fancied insult to the Jaxie gods.

And greatest of these was the goddess who slept. Only the highest hierarchy of Jaxie priesthood was initiated into the legend. A living woman who had lain in a cataleptic state for centuries, her awakening was supposed to herald a new era for the Jaxies.

THIS WAS the legend that had brought Herrick upon his search. Behind every religion was some buried truth, some provable fact. He knew, too, that here and there in the desert were evidences of culture far beyond that of the Jaxies, as if some visiting race had paused for a short span, and gone its way. And if the woman who slept was one of these, placed in a cataleptic state, she might be the clue to the medical mystery that so obsessed him.

As they moved forward, the gurgling became louder. Covan paused to listen again, then said, "We're getting close. Hear that trickle? That's the spring that runs through the crypt."

Somehow, without wanting to, Herrick found himself believing. The an-

cient squareness of the tunnel entrance, the functional directness of the tunnel—these things were beyond the constructional abilities of the Jaxies. More than that, the very tunnel breathed its ancientness. Its brooding silence made even the Jaxie legend believable.

They came to another door. Covan said, "She lies just beyond that door. Give me my pay."

"When I see her." Caution vanishing in his eagerness, Herrick pushed through the stone door.

He stood within a cubical crypt, perhaps twenty feet on a side, as severely perfect in line as the tunnel had been. In front of him, water from some hidden spring burred its timeless way along a channel through the crypt, and some system of apertures that led out of these depths to the sky above let in a diffused radiance. Above ground, the sun must already be rising on the horizon.

Yet, he passed by these things with unseeing eyes, seeing the niche in the far wall of the cubical crypt. The niche was waist high, perhaps six feet wide, and upon the smooth red stone of its floor lay a woman.

Herrick sucked in his breath in a gasp. The woman was dark haired and white skinned, and a timeless radiance lay upon her complexion. The white veil-like robe that covered her chest was immobile; no faint breath disturbed its fragile folds.

Covan's voice beside him was a hard reality, a sacreligious whine. "My money, Herrick. My thousand taels."

He seized his wallet and jerked out a bill. He thrust the bill toward Covan savagely, yet here he could not make himself shout and he whispered, "Take it! Take it and get out, you money grubbing jackal!"

And Covan was gone, fleeing as though a thousand Jaxies and their

trident spears were after him, fleeing on legs of panic. The door closed and Herrick was alone with the woman and the gurgling of the spring.

He moved forward, wading through the water, and touched the veil that looked so soft. At the touch he stared, unbelieving, and then slid his hand to touch the white cheek of the woman. The cheek was hard and cold as stone. "A statue," he whispered, "Only a statue."

He shrieked at himself then in the crypt. "Herrick, you fool! She's only stone, a woman of stone!"

How long he stood there, with the little stream gurgling over his feet, he did not know, but after a time he lifted his head, and curiosity began to conquer his bitterness.

SOMEWHERE, behind this reality, there lay history. The woman, the tunnel, all spoke of a technology more advanced than that of Earth. He began a closer inspection of the crypt. Even filled with bitterness as he was, he could not suppress the feeling of elation that followed his finding of hieroglyphics and pictures on the wall. Their form was interesting. They appeared as merely sunken tracings, like those made in paraffin by a hot rod.

There had been a ship, not too different from his own, and some kind of trouble, he could make that out. And at one point another niche in the wall, a tiny one this time, held a minute vial of some white crystalline powder. He was staring at the powder when a sound behind him jerked his thoughts back to reality.

He whirled, to see death leering at him from behind a dozen Jaxie spears. Behind the spears, the faces of the Jaxies were leathery, frowning, fanatical. Their skins were dry. Perspiration played no part in the Jaxie body.

The Jaxies were entirely surround-

ing him. The spear tips were crudely forged of iron—sharp and large. The Jaxies pressed forward with their spears until he was against the wall of the crypt, the carvings pressing into his back as he shrunk away from the savage spear tips.

He tried to slide his hand quietly to the Beta gun at his waist, but at the motion the spears pricked deep, and Covan's voice called from outside the circle: "Don't try it, Herrick. Drop your belt and gun on the floor."

His mind whirling, Herrick obeyed. "Covan, you damned traitor," he called. "What is this?"

Covan ignored him and spoke to the Jaxie chief. Herrick could understand most of it. Covan was asking for money. He was selling Herrick to the Jaxies, and from the look of it, he had sold Earthmen before. After some haggling, the Jaxie chief handed over some bills.

HERRICK CRIED out, "Covan, you can't do this." Yet, he knew the truth as he spoke. Covan was a sort of slave trader.

Covan's eyes glittered at him. "Sneer at me now, fool. Sneer at me when they dissect you. Think, as their knives bite, of the contribution you make to science, their science."

Covan's words had the ring of conviction. "But why?" Herrick gasped. "Why should they?"

Covan stood close, just outside the circle of spears. He said, "Our chemistry is different than that of the Jaxies—you know that. Just as the chemistry of the woman is different. They hope to find a way to bring the woman alive by the study of the bodies of Earthmen."

"But the woman is stone. Don't they realize that?"

"That but protects the sleeping goddess against damage until she awakes."

"You don't believe that!"

"Perhaps not. But meanwhile, the Jaxies pay well for experimental subjects."

Held back by the spears, hot hatred flamed in Herrick's brain. Yet, an instant later, he found his mind whirling with what Covan had suggested.

A catalepsy in stone. His mind reeled with the staggering implication of that fact. It could be. A hundred legends on the planets bore it out. He thought of his own ancient Earth legends, of the Medusa, whose glance turned men to stone.

And he found that he was crying aloud, crying in broken Jaxie language, telling the Jaxie chief that he was a doctor, that he knew far more of the human body than they could learn by dissecting. That he would help them solve the mystery of the sleeping beauty of stone. He saw too the quick shift of Covan's eyes, weighing this and waiting; not acting too soon, like a fool acts.

And at length, the spears receded a foot. The Jaxie chief said shortly, "So, dog of an Earthman, you think you can awaken the goddess who sleeps."

"This was no time to be hesitant. 'I can.' Herrick bluffed.

"Very well. We will give you five minutes."

Herrick said swiftly, "It is not enough. I must read these writings further."

The Jaxie chief grunted suspiciously at him. "We will wait." He gave an order, and the Jaxie group hunkered down on the sandstone floor, spears ready, watching him. Silence fell, broken only by the song of the spring burbling through the crypt.

TENSE, HERRICK turned to the writings. There was a remote possibility that his last thought had been the true one. That the woman, pos-

sessed of some such knowledge as the legendary Medusa possessed, and marooned here, had turned herself to stone until such time as her companions could find her and return her to the original state.

It was not so far-fetched as it sounded. It would involve some chemical that suffused the entire body, perhaps merely a simple change, the substitution of organic silicon atoms for those of carbon would do the trick. And perhaps this reaction was unstable, so that a simple and tiny amount of catalyst would reverse the process.

The vial of white powder in a niche of the crypt! A chill of superstition crawled down Herrick's back as he groped for the vial. It was incredible, but possible. Even he was enough of a chemist to see that. And here within the crypt that had been built by an advanced science, he began to believe. The Jaxies, having a body chemistry totally unlike man had not even considered its use. He seized the vial from its niche.

The vial was closed by a tiny, ground glass stopper. He twisted the stopper gently and it came out. He stared at the powder inside, as one stares at a miracle, and yet the scientist in him knew that even if this powder were the catalyst that would end the catalepsy, it was no miracle, but a simple chemical. The true miracle lay in the chemistry that had reduced the woman to her catalepsy.

He held the vial aloft, so that Covan and the Jaxie chief could see it well. He said, "I place this upon her lips and she lives again. But if she lives, you must let me talk to her. She will need my care, once she awakens."

The Jaxie chief grunted, "If she wakes, you shall have whatever you wish."

Covan merely said in English, "You

are a bigger fool than I thought. She is only a statue."

AND LOOKING at him, seeing the first faint trace of fear in his eyes, Herrick taunted him, "Remember the Medusa, Covan? She was but an ancient woman from another world, like this one. See the writings here on the crypt? She was marooned, and built this crypt out of the science of her age, then went to sleep in stone, waiting for her kind, waiting for the kiss of this catalyst on her lips."

And with the words, he believed. The brook in the crypt sang, *true, true*, and fear came into Covan's eyes.

Covan moved in a frantic blur. Seizing a Jaxie spear, he thrust at Herrick, so that Herrick had to drop to his haunches to let the spear pierce above him.

But Covan slashed down with the shaft of the spear and caught his hand, the hand that held the vial, and with the numbing force of the blow, the vial slipped from his numbed fingers and, bouncing once, fell into the stream. Before Herrick could even comprehend the disaster, the vial had floated downstream and under the wall of the crypt, vanishing into the timeless rock.

But one faint trace remained; a tiny crystal had fallen out of the vial and lay at the edge of the stream, too tiny to be of use—to be transferred even.

Herrick moistened his finger in his mouth and dropped to his knees. He touched the moistened finger tip to the crystal and picked it up. Even in that trace of moisture it dissolved. He touched the tip to his nose and then his tongue, hoping that some faint trace of odor, some taste, might give some clue to the nature of the white powder.

And his heart leaped, for the taste was familiar.

He was aware then that Covan had been ranting at the Jaxie chief, accusing him of trying to poison the sleeping woman.

He had not time to argue. His one thought was to get to the ashes of his plane. The chemical was salt, common salt, and somewhere on the desert there should be tablets flung by the explosion of his plane.

IN THE hesitation that followed the dropping of the vial, and Covan's harangue, he leaped over the first ring of Jaxie spears, and headed for the entrance through which he had entered the crypt.

Yet, he was too late. Two Jaxies blocked that egress. He ran around the side, seeing another door, the one through which the Jaxies had come. He pushed through and fled into the darkness with his hands before him and the Jaxie horde pouring into the darkened tunnel after him.

He fell, tripped over some unknown projection, yet had presence of mind to roll against one side of the tunnel, and hope that the Jaxies would race on by. He heard them go by, shrieking war cries, and for an instant the tunnel was filled with the scent of their bodies. Then, just as he thought they were gone, some trailing Jaxie came too close to the corner and tripped over him, to fall as he had fallen on the rough floor of the tunnel.

He leaped to his feet and raced back toward where he had come. The Jaxie whooped behind him, calling the others back, and he knew his advantage was short lived. He burst into the lighted crypt and tried the other door, but as he pushed it open, he heard other Jaxies coming there. He withdrew into the crypt, trapped, looking wildly about.

There was only one hiding place, a mad one. He swung himself up into

the niche, beside the woman of stone, and crawling over her, tried to bury himself behind her body. He looked at her, wishing she were not so beautiful, wishing she were fat and dumpy, big enough to hide behind, the sweat standing out on his brow and his heart hammering until it was loud in the crypt.

And in that instant, madness seized him. Lying there like a lover with his sleeping bride, he prayed to all the gods he knew. And in his frenzy, he even prayed to her. He pressed his lips against her cold stone lips and called upon her to awaken. He lay beside her, hugging the stone floor as the two groups of Jaxies burst into the crypt.

They began to argue wildly, and he lay without breathing. For an instant, he thought that they were going to leave, and then one of them glanced up, and shrieked. Glancing down, he could see that his shoe extended beyond that of the woman and had betrayed him.

H E KNEW IT was all over. He sat up, waiting for them to come and get him, thinking that this was as good a place to die as any other, with the little stream singing his death song and the woman beside him.

There seemed to be some delay. They were considering how to avoid desecration of their Goddess by coming up to seize him. He glanced at her again, grateful for this.

And he saw her chest move. He became aware of the warmth where he lay against her side. The folds of cloth fell, and a faint flush suffused his cheeks.

Even then, he did not believe. He knew that it would have taken salt to awake her, not prayers, but sodium chloride. Yet, suddenly, his memory told him how she had awakened.

It had been the kiss. Not the kiss of a Fairy Princess, but the sweat salt kiss of a man who had been running for his life. And as he lay beside her, the salt of his perspiration touching the stone, the salt of his kiss upon her lips, the subtle chemistry that she had arranged began to work and her sleep was ended.

Now, like a bride awakening, she sat up and looked about her. She saw the Jaxies and their threatening spears, and the Jaxies saw the motion of their Goddess.

The Jaxies screamed, and the woman fumbled in the folds of her robe. She drew forth a crystal wheel and spun the wheel, so that a faint whistling sound grew in the crypt. A vague shimmering took place in the air before them, moving outward until it touched the Jaxies. And when it touched them, it repelled them, for it was some kind of force. As Herrick watched, the Jaxies were pushed out of the crypt as easily as a man brushes a gnat from his arm.

The woman had knowledge, science beyond that of Earth, there was no doubt of that. But what would she think of Herrick when she became aware of him?

She stirred, aware of the touch of his side, and looked toward him questioningly. He smiled, and after a second that seemed hours long, she smiled back at him.

This was going to be interesting, he thought. Perhaps she would teach him how to make statues. He wondered what kind of statue Covan would make.

She spoke, a soft and liquid voice in a strange tongue, "Esssss."

Herrick grinned back at her. He imagined she was lonely, after that long sleep. "Esssss," he agreed. "Yes, indeed."

The VOYAGE of the SITTING DUCK

By Burt B. Liston



She struggled to escape his arms
as the bombs loosed their holocaust

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By Burt B. Lison



She struggled to escape his arms as the bombs loosed their holocaust



It took a savage Earthgirl to show the Martian captain just who was the slave and who the master

AN ELECTRIC SILENCE fell. It was obvious from the Rama's manner that a decision had been reached. His ascetic features were smoothed of betraying expressions.

"Gentlemen, it is the opinion of the

Council of Three that unless something is done immediately, the war could easily be lost. Victory can be attained only by recruiting another hundred thousand men to our cause." He paused, dark, dramatic eyes moving slowly from face to face. "War



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is fought with machines of one kind or another. But behind those machines is the manpower which makes them, and drives them, and uses them. It is this manpower which has been drained from us."

"But a hundred thousand men, Rama..." Yarbut, chief of the air forces, began. He stopped and his hands, which he had thrust outward, quivered. "Where are we to obtain these fighters?"

"Fighters?" Rama's brows lifted. "I was not aware I had mentioned fighters. Slave labor, Yarbut! Men to work in the mines, men to work in the engine rooms of our giant air cruisers, men to make the machinery of war that our people shall use to victory." Rama held up a peremptory hand as Yarbut opened his lips. "There is but a single place where this large a slave force may be obtained. The planet Earth!"

The ten men who flanked Rama around the oval table searched each other's faces. But their questioning looks were momentary. Rama had not finished with his plan.

"It will not be hard. A single major transport plus one destroyer. Five hundred fighting men and a hundred technicians. We can spare them. Our sister planet holds the answer to victory. Now, gentlemen, any questions?"

They came hard and fast: How were the men to be transported? Could they be brought to Mars in time to insure victory? Was Rama certain there would be no involvement in another inter-planetary war? And the last question, asked by Puti, the steely-eyed, frozen-faced Minister of Police: Who was to be in charge of this important mission?

"Is that so important?" Rama flashed Puti an impatient stare. Sometimes, the Minister of Police forgot his place.

Puti lowered his eyes, but persisted in continuing: "There have been rumors some of the Captains are wearying of this eternal struggle. My question is justified."

"Rumors, Puti? You bring me news of rumors? I gave you the all-powerful sword of police authority. Has it turned dull in your hands?"

Puti turned pale. Rama could break him as easily as a man breaks a twig. He spoke with an effort at clarity: "No, Rama! I have not failed in my duty. Already my men—"

Rama cut him short: "Enough. Now, I will speak of those in charge of the expedition. In command of the transport and the technicians will be Captain Dane, our foremost scientist, a man whose devotion to duty is unquestioned. Captain Dane has been selected by the Council because he, more than any other, has unshakable faith in the destiny of Mars to rule. Nothing will sway or deter him from the path of duty." A small smile suddenly lighted the ascetic features. "However, sometimes the light which illumines the path to duty grows dim. Captain Mura, who will be in charge of the men aboard the destroyer, is being sent along to provide the fuel, should that be necessary."

Their faces were grave with respect. Rama left nothing to chance. In quick order, Rama answered the questions they had asked. When he was done, all doubt had been dispelled about the success of the venture.

CAPTAIN DANE was satisfied with the way things were going. The transport had landed, a camp site had been found, and the preliminary work had already begun for the establishment of the laboratories and work shops. He stood in the shade of the metal hut which served as his base quarters and watched the charged

fence being put up.

A shadow fell across his vision. The tall soldierly figure of Captain Mura stood before him. Mura removed his helmet and wiped his brow. "A blazing day. Pity your poor men out there putting up that fence."

Dane smiled and stood aside for the other to pass. Mura fell into a chair, slid his holstered blast gun out of the way, and heaved a sigh of contentment. Dane leaned his wiry length against the door jamb and waited for Mura to tell what brought him over in the mid-day heat.

"Nice place you have here," Mura said. Then, with reflection: "Doesn't hurt to have a spot of comfort. The grim, unrelenting life of a fighting man sometimes palls, y'know...."

"Comfort won't stay long," Dane said. "There's the very devil of a job ahead. My boys should be done with the prelims in another day. After that..." he blew his breath out as though to accent the unspoken words.

"Yes! That's why I thought I'd stop by. Sort of get matters right between us. Not that I don't know my specific duty. Just things in general."

"Things were kind of rushed, weren't they? Do you know the overall plan?"

"I've a hazy idea," Mura said. He reached for the icewater carafe and poured himself a glassful. "Want to elaborate?"

"We're here to recruit a hundred thousand men, one way or another, and ship them to Mars. On the surface, it sounds like an impossible task. But it's not too difficult. If—"

"If?"

"We gain their confidence. Now, this is what we know about Earth and its peoples. Photo-records on file over the past number of centuries show the entire planet is devoted to agrarian pursuits. The age of science has been dead for ten thousand years

on this planet. But that's another matter. The thing to keep in mind is the kind of people we're dealing with."

"They're simple folk, given to the pursuit of their calling. Photo-records do not show a single shred of evidence that they have weapons other than the most simple, the bow-and-arrow, a knife, a spear, and with some tribes, a sword."

"Now! We have three months. In that time, I must build a hundred ships for transport, gather the men we need, teach them the uses of machines. On board the transport are all the pieces of equipment I need. The raw material grows out there; all I need of it. My technicians shape this material into space craft, we place the hundred thousand men aboard, and we're off."

"Just like that, eh? And suppose our native Earth friends aren't peaceable, or suppose they don't take to our methods of conscription?"

Dane's eyes narrowed. "Then you will step in and show them we mean business."

Mura laughed softly, patted his knees and stood up. "Thanks, Dane. Now I can shove off. And say, stop in at our compound; have a look at a fighter's life when he's not at his trade."

"I will," Dane promised. "Soon as I get things running smoothly here. Maybe I'll bring a few natives along. To sort of impress them."

"Not a bad idea."

Dane walked to the gate before the metal hut, watched Mura until he passed from sight, then turned again to watch the stringing of the fence.

"THEY MUST be gods, Jan-t," the boy whispered. "Those silly things they came in, the flames shooting from the tails...."

"Quiet, Dward," the girl said, placing a silencing finger against his

mouth. "They seem to have two legs and arms, just as we do." She crawled further along the thick branch.

She heard his thin voice following her: "Riffin said we must stay away. Jan-ti!"

But she was out of sight now, her slender brown figure almost as one with the branch. She parted the fronds and peered down the length of grassland to the strange silvery thing that glinted in the sun. She saw the men clearly now, more clearly than she had earlier from a farther distance. If they were Gods, they were Gods in the forms of men....

Her attention was caught by the sight of a couple of them coming in her direction. They were moving beside a strange wheel on which was a great length of the shiny woven material. Suddenly, her jungle-trained ears were held by a slithering sound. She turned.

Her heart stopped beating, and her breath came up to her throat to choke her. A tree beast! Coming toward her along the branch. Its wedge-shaped head was moving restlessly back and forth as it slithered along. She moved with a swiftness born of fear and loathing. It was a fifteen foot drop, but she landed light as a feather. But as she turned to the protection of the forest directly behind her, she stumbled over a fallen log and fell with a crash.

She got to her feet too late. The two men she had seen had heard her fall and had come at a run. She caught a glimpse of something in their hands, something which they returned to a leather pocket on their belt. Then, their hands were helping her gain balance. They spoke, but their words had no meaning. She could only point toward the branch from which she'd jumped. One of the two looked up. His hand went swiftly back to the thing in the leather pocket. He

drew it out and a second later, thunder and flame came from a hole at the end of the strange thing.

Something fell from the green darkness above. She looked down. It was the tree beast. There wasn't much left of it....

Now, there was an urgency in their voices. They pointed to themselves, then to her, and last to the gleaming house behind the woven mysterious thing. Her eyes searched their faces. She shook her head a couple of times as if satisfied with what she saw.

She smiled, cocked her head and called: "Dward. I am going with these two. Wait for me...."

HE LET her walk about freely.

And though he seemed to pay no attention to her, his eyes never left her face or body. He decided she walked with the grace of a jungle animal he had once seen on Mercury. Fluid motion. And that face... The beauty of a by-gone day, like a statuette of an ancient Goddess of Mars. Strange, he mused, but he had never thought of these people of Earth, as physical personalities also. Well, the barrier of language would soon be passed. The men should be back with the transposition machine.

Her eyes were wide in wonder, but he was quick to note the lack of fear. She was merely curious. And when he held the earphones to her, she accepted them and imitated his every action. Shortly, there was the low hum of the generator, the bright flash of a spark gap and the brilliant glow of tiny tubes. He saw her eyes widen, then close as waves of controlled current penetrated the brain wall. He watched time pass. One minute, two, three... His fingers depressed the switch and the machine had performed its miracle.

One of the technicians removed the

earphones. The girl had a look of having just awakened from a deep and dreamless sleep.

"Now we can talk," he said.

She nodded, but said nothing. Her thoughts were confused, incoherent, but only for a moment. Then confusion, doubt and uncertainty fled. There was something about this strange being that reminded her of Riffin, but a younger Riffin, and a more handsome one. When he smiled, as now...

"Don't you want to talk, Jan-t?"

He knew her name. But how?

He answered her unspoken question: "The machine recorded every memory you could conceivably have, even racial memory. At the same time, it enabled you to understand me. But it cannot do one thing, give me a constant minute-by-minute record of your thoughts as they occur now. Your present will always be a mystery to me."

She looked at the machine. To think that metal casing, those fine strands of wire, the glittering shells of crystal held such power. Her eyes returned to search his. "I understand," she said, "without knowing how or why. But I cannot remember. Come."

He followed her to the doorway. The line of her arm was a thing of beauty as it went out in a point. "Out there in the jungle," she said, "is a dead city, hidden under the great trees. I saw it once. Great stone blocks crumbling to dust, the twisted skeletons of metal pillars, the rubble of a lost time. Tell me of that city."

He felt wonder rise in him. She spoke with poetic words, with lyric feeling. He thought for a moment, brought back what the machine had told him. "It was called Chicago," he said. "It lived and died a long time ago, and it was one of the greatest cities in the entire world. But the peo-

ple of that world had lost the meaning of peace, and so they died in the futility of war, just as that city died. Civilization died! Only man was left, man and a few animals, and for a very long time there was little difference between the two. Time went by, thousands of years of time. And as time went by, the effects of those last atomic blasts were dissipated and absorbed, as were the effects of the great bacteriological dust clouds which had rained on Earth. Man was reborn, returned to the pursuits of his ancient forebears, to the tilling of the soil and the care of his animals. Only the great cities remained dead."

"And we are the inheritors of that infamous past," she murmured.

THE WORDS had come unbidden to his lips. He had repeated what the machine had impregnated in his brain. But he had not thought of their effect. It was frightening. Was this to be the fate of Mars, of all planets dedicated to war? True, they had outlawed the use of atomic warfare, but who was to say that all treaties would not be thrown into the discard if desperation drove hard enough?

For the first time, Dane felt the stirring of doubt. Was it right to devote oneself so blindly to duty? Where was right in what he had been told to do? A slight shudder shook his lean frame.

"Is there something wrong?"

He looked at her for a full ten seconds before he realized she had spoken. "No-no! I mean, nothing is wrong. Jan-t, I want you to bring the headman of your village to the compound. I must ask him something."

She looked away from him, and he saw her glance was now on the huge gleaming oval of their space ship. "My brother and I saw your ship and another come in last night. We thought

you were Gods coming to Earth in vehicles of flame. Now, I know you are men. Why have you come? What do you want of us?"

How could he explain? What words could he use that would not be painful?

She went on: "One of your men killed the snake that frightened me. A single shot from a weapon he carried. Some of your men are not armed, but all the men from the other ship are armed. I have seen them. They seem different, colder, more cruel, as if killing things were natural with them."

"They are fighting men," his words came quickly in defense. He tried to explain: "We are from another world, another planet. And we are at war. Our cause is just, Jan-t! I came here for help."

She laughed. "Help? Our spears and arrows against these things which can kill with the swiftness of striking lightning. How can we be of help?"

"We do not need your simple weapons, Jan-t. We do need the men of your land."

"For what?" the words came short and hard. They were said as a man would say them.

He couldn't tell her. "Bring the headman, Jan-t. I'll give him the answer."

He felt the sudden emptiness of the room as he watched her swing lithely across the level grassland, and knew he had to see her again, talk to her again. But more than anything, he wanted to know her nearness.

MMURA'S FACE bore a wry look. "Let's be sensible, Dane. I haven't seen the girl, but I'm quite willing to admit her beauty and wild charm. But to let her affect you like this—I find it incredible."

"Call it what you want. I find it irritating." Dane nibbled at a finger. He was still lost in thought and did

not notice how quiet and thoughtful Mura was. "I didn't think when I put the memory-language-transposer-and-recorder machine to work that this would come of it. Like a picture. An immense city falling to ruin. I keep thinking of Lorenta on Mars. Will its crystal towers and graceful arches become the rubble of history also?"

"Snap out of it, man!" Mura said brusquely. "The damned girl's hypnotized you."

"Has she?" Dane murmured. "Or have I hypnotized myself these years?"

"Isn't it too late to think of that?" Mura demanded. "We have a mission to perform. That's the only thing that should be in your mind. This isn't your land, nor your planet. Once we leave, you will forget it quickly enough."

"I suppose so." Dane heaved a sigh and started for the door. "I had to talk this over with you. Hope I didn't disturb you too much, Mura."

Mura walked Dane to the door. He patted his shoulder as they stared into the night. "Go on, man. Get to bed. Sleep it off. And if you can't, don't be a fool. She's a woman, and you know what women are for."

Dane said nothing. He moved slowly and thoughtfully down the path leading to his camp. Presently, even the sound of his footsteps were no longer heard.

For a long moment, Captain Mura stared bemused into the silent night. Finally, he turned and strode back into the room. He went straight to the inner room which was his office, and snapped on the switch that connected him with the communications officer aboard his ship. He gave the man several terse and explicit orders, and flicked the switch down.

RIFFIN, the headman, listened with rapt wonder to Jan-t's story.

Dward sat close to his sister, looking from one to another with bright childish glances.

"You say he wants to see me?" Riffin asked. "Did he not say why?"

"Only to say he needs our help. He said he would explain to you."

"And we will understand each other? A thing of great wonder, indeed. But I see the light of doubt in your eyes. Do you fear these men?"

"Not Captain Dane!" There was no question of that. "But I fear the others. The ones who came in the other ship..."

"Are they not all alike, all together?"

"Captain Dane is good. I do not know the others."

"I see," Riffin said gently. He saw more than she thought; he understood immediately the attraction the captain from another planet had for this primitive young girl.

"Very well, Jan-t. Lead me to this stranger from another planet."

A hundred armed men escorted Riffin and the girl to the edge of the forest. As he and Jan-t moved away from the protecting growth, Riffin turned to his followers. "Jan-t says they have weapons far superior to ours. Keep this in mind. I have no fear for our return, but should I be wrong, do not attack blindly. I am ready now, child. Lead on."

DANE BORE the look of a man who had spent a sleepless night. His eyes were bloodshot and his brain weary. The schedule of the day's operation lay on his desk before him, but his eyes were fixed blindly on the paper. Suddenly, he felt the presence of someone in the room with him.

He looked up to meet the dark brooding eyes of Captain Mura.

"I see my advice fell on deaf ears," Mura said.

"I tried," Dane protested wearily. "Sleep wouldn't come."

"Pity. By the way, this came this morning. Read it."

Dane spread the paper Mura tossed to him and read what it had to say. His face went pale as the meaning of the words dawned on him. "Why—why this places you in full command of the expedition."

"Precisely! Rama decided the military should hold complete authority. You should be happy, Dane. Now, you can stop worrying. The responsibility will be mine. Be sensible, man. If the girl comes back, do with her as I suggested."

They both looked up as heel taps sounded beyond the door. An armed sentry appeared on the threshold. "Two natives, sir. A man and a girl. The girl says she's been asked to bring the man."

"Jan-t! She's brought the headman. Mura, please don't be rough—"

"Leave it to me, Dane," Mura cut the other short. "Can't play games with these people. Send them in."

Dane, watching Mura, saw the man's eyes widen at sight of Jan-t. "You were right about her, Dane," Mura murmured in an aside. "A lovely, lovely piece. You're twice a fool. Well, if you won't, I will." His voice rose. "You are the headman?"

"Yes," Jan-t answered for Riffin. She turned to Dane. "Who is he?"

"The leader of our expedition."

"I do not like him. He has a cruel mouth and hungry eyes."

"Never mind your opinion of me. I'll change that later. For the present, ask him how soon he can bring us a hundred thousand men."

She turned to Mura after a moment's talk with Riffin. "He wants to know what you wish to do with them?"

"They will help us to victory over the Venusians. I promise their safe

return afterward."

"When will that be?" Jan-t asked after another moment with Riffin.

MMURA SHRUGGED his shoulders impatiently. This talk through an interpreter irked him. Devil take Dane! Now that Mura had made him suspect, he couldn't trust him. Idiot questions! His temper, never far below the surface, began to rise.

"I don't know. Not long."

"A year, two?" This time, she asked the questions on her own.

"I said I didn't know. What's more, it isn't important."

"Not important, indeed! You will leave us nothing but women and children. Who will till the soil, hunt, build the houses?"

"Devil take your woman's tongue!" His temper boiled over. "Sentry!" The man appeared and stood at attention. "Bring me a scourge."

"Wait," Dane said hastily.

"Quiet!" Mura took the scourge from the sentry and slapped the slender metal handle against a palm. "Do you see this? It's a scourge, a ten-thonged whip. Bound like this, I can strike but a single man. Watch. I remove the bindings—now the thongs come loose. I strike again, and ten men feel the lash."

This time, it was Riffin who gave him direct answer. Mura turned to Dane. "What has he said?"

"He wants to know what you'll gain by killing all the men? A logical question. Now, hold on a moment, Mura. You've begged sense of me, now I beg it of you. We'll gain nothing by force; in the end, we'll have to fight these people. Remember the over-all plan. Dead men are of no use to us. And we don't have eternity for our recruiting."

A sinister smile thinned Mura's lips. "I don't intend to fight the men. Tell him I will not leave a stick or

stone that will be of use. Tell him there will not be a woman or child alive in the whole of the land. But first, this woman will be put to a particular use. Tell him that!"

"You're the leader of the expedition now. You tell him!"

"I order you to tell him." Mura's voice was ice water dripping down Dane's spine.

"I refuse."

Mura's smile widened. "You think I am stalemated, that I am helpless without you? Let me correct you, Dane. The great Rama left nothing to chance. Didn't you think it odd that you had no choice in the matter of technicians who came with you? Rama foresaw a possible dereliction of duty. Perhaps there is no one who can replace you? But the plans are there, and there are those who can carry them to the end. I give you a last chance."

Mura paled at Dane's abrupt refusal.

DDANE'S face contorted in pain as Mura lashed him suddenly with the scourge. Several of the wire thongs caught him across the face, and he brought his hands up to the torn flesh. Blood seeped from between the spread fingers. Blood thundered and pounded in his brain, and a red veil of anger was a curtain before his eyes.

Mura whirled on the two before him. "You!" he shouted at the headman. "Do as I order, or I will have every child in your village whipped to death. Collect the men I want. Have them brought to this compound. Fail me, and I promise you untold punishments."

He turned toward Dane, started to say something and saw, too late that Dane was no longer holding his bleeding face. Mura tried to reach the blast gun in his holster, but Dane

reached him before he could get to it. Mura's hands went up, but they were as matchsticks against the fists of flesh and bone Dane threw at him. A whiplash blow caught him in the pit of the stomach, another on the point of the chin, and Mura crashed face down to the floor. He lay as one dead.

"You've killed him," Jan-t breathed.

"No," Dane gasped. "He's only stunned." He pulled the blast gun from Mura's holster. "Hurry," he urged, "before he comes out of it."

The sentry looked up as the door closed behind Dane and those with him. The sentry began a salute, saw the lacerated bleeding face and the blast gun in Dane's hand, and reached for his own gun.

"Hold it, man!" Dane's voice held death for the other. "Walk beside me. Slowly. To where the trees begin."

"You can return now," Dane said, as the shadows of the forest fell about them.

The man hesitated for a second, as though desirous of joining them, then turned and went back at a slow trot....

"**YOU** WILL have to leave this place," Dane said. "Mura will be insane with anger, and until that anger dies, he will try to kill one and all."

"We are not afraid," Riffin said calmly.

"It has nothing to do with fear," Dane pointed out. "Your puny arrows and swords are of no use against them. I know!"

"But this is our home, this land is part of us, this village has known the birth and death of a hundred generations. One doesn't willingly go."

That was Mura's mistake, Dane thought wryly. Had the fool given him a few days of thought, habit and custom, and the hundred and one things

which make up the word duty would have extinguished the small flame of sympathy Jan-t had kindled in his breast. But Mura had only wanted power. And in gaining that power, he had brought full consciousness of what desire to power meant.

Dane knew he had broken with the past for good and all.

"He can't destroy the land," Dane reasoned. "Homes can be rebuilt, humans never. The land will still be here on your return."

There was a long thoughtful silence after Dane's words. He waited tensely for the answer of these brown-skinned men sitting in a circle. Suddenly, he felt a small warm hand in his. He turned his head.

It was Jan-t. She smiled, and he felt warmth steal over him. He pressed her fingers and she answered the small pressure. "They will do as you say, Dane. I know. These are my people."

She was right.

Riffin had been listening closely to the low murmur of voices. Presently, he looked toward Dane. "We agree to what you say. Of course, this means war. But at least it will be a war fought on ground of our choice, and it will be our kind of war. Do you have any suggestions?"

A hundred, he thought. Then: "Yes. Retreat into the depths of the forest. We Martians had three months in which to accomplish our end. Mura has five hundred fighting men; we can't count the technicians. A part of his force must stand guard now over the work shops and laboratories. He will have to pursue. Men must eat to fight. Destroy all food, animal and vegetable; harrass the men at the compound, fight the unseen fight; never come into the open."

"And if we manage to hold out the three months?" Riffin asked.

"Rama, who is leader of the Mar-

tian forces, will either have to send reinforcements or withdraw. Good judgment will force him to take the latter course. He simply can't afford to send men and ships to Mura's help. Further, Mura's pride will not permit him to ask for help."

Riffin nodded as though satisfied with Dane's answer. An hour later, the first of the women and children were led into the jungle....

CAPTAIN MURA paced his office restlessly. He knew now he had committed an error of judgment. Two months had gone by. The technicians had done their part, harried and hampered as they had been by these damnable natives who sneaked through the trees and crawled in the grass like animals. And like animals, struck with cunning and ferocity.

Damn them!

He looked again at the latest casualty list. A hundred and fifty men dead, two hundred wounded. He wiped the sweat from his forehead with the back of his hand. Damn this jungle-like land! He tried to think clearly, but it was so hard. His thoughts swung to the man responsible for this, and to the slim half-naked woman. He steeled his will. If it took the last man to bring them to heel, it would be worth the price.

He moved with slow steps to the door and stood looking out into the encompassing jungle. They were out there, he knew. Hiding in every bit of cover, waiting for the slightest move. An arrow was silent, and as deadly as a blast shell. And he was losing the battles because he was being forced to their kind of fighting.

Quite suddenly, the deep lines of worry and despair smoothed. A thought had come unbidden to his mind. It had followed hard on another, the one about fighting their kind of fight. He berated himself mentally

for not having thought of it sooner. His sudden shouted command startled the sleeping birds and awakened the jungle night noises. But he was deaf to them.

Nor did he bother to explain the orders he gave to his second-in-command.

THE RUNNER was breathless with excitement. Riffin's face, now thin and lined from hunger and days and nights of constant watchfulness, assumed a thoughtful expression.

"What do you think this can mean?" he asked Dane.

Dane didn't reply immediately. Mura's retreat could mean any of a number of things. Guessing could lead nowhere and everywhere. Perhaps to that place Mura wanted him to go? Yet, it was obvious Mura could go nowhere except back to his base. But if it was so obvious, then it would be the better part of discretion to be on guard.

Dane threw questions at the runner. Were they all gone? Did some leave first? Was their withdrawal orderly? And last, did they have the looks of beaten men?

They had retreated in order, all of them, and with confidence....

"I don't know what to think," Dane replied at last.

But Riffin did not try to look too deeply into why Mura had ordered a retreat. His simple mind was not used to subtleties of thought, or the maneuverings of a man versed in all the strategies of war. Retreat meant simply Mura had given up.

"You look too deeply for reasons," Riffin voiced his thoughts. "There can be no other than that he is beaten and has given up. All we need know is where he is going."

"Back to his base," Dane said.

"Follow him and attack in full force. Our sheer numbers will over-

power him."

"You forget his superior weapons," Dane reminded the other.

"I forget nothing! What use have these weapons been to him? Ours deal death as surely."

It was the thing Dane had feared from the moment the tide had turned in their favor. Riffin was overconfident now. They could win every battle but the last.

"Then you have made your mind up?" Dane asked.

"Yes."

"Let me give you a single word of advice. Caution!"

"I will remember. Let's break camp now, Dane. We must collect all the men possible."

GREAT searchlights mounted on slender towers swung their beams in steady arcs across the wide stretch of grassland. There were so many of them, it was impossible to pierce the glare they produced, and also impossible to attempt an attack. The sound of giant machines thundered, and now and then great flashes of flame that were like forked lightning flared into the night sky.

A great wall had been erected to serve both as barrier to sight and attack.

"If only we could sneak a couple of men past that wall," Dane pounded a fist into a palm. "Mura's brewing something, and I don't like its odor."

"What can he do?" Riffin asked lightly. "A week has gone by. Another week, and we will have fifty thousand warriors at our call. Let them do their worst."

So Riffin had forgotten the caution Dane had begged of him. Well, Dane thought, if Mura was putting the skill and science of the technicians to work for him, it meant he was planning a master stroke. And he was helpless to

prevent it.

Worse than that, Dane thought, Riffin was now overconfident. He had built a new village and had brought the women and children in from their jungle hideouts. Jan-t was the only bright light in the gloom he had felt for the past week. He had not realized how much he had missed her until he saw her again. He remembered how his arms had gone out in an unconscious gesture, and how she had flown into them.

Their first kiss... It was as though they had been enveloped in a fire. He knew with the meeting of their lips that he could never leave her. No matter what the outcome, this was now his life and future....

He slithered backward until he was on open ground. Riffin followed a few seconds later.

"I'm going back to the village," Dane said. "Coming?"

"Later. I want to dispose the men to better positions."

"A good idea. Well then, I'll see you later."

SHE WAS framed by the shallow arch of the doorway. Dward looked up at his approach, grinned, and moved away from his sister toward a group of children playing nearby. She stood, a beautiful slender woman, and waited the coming of her lover.

Time stood still until their lips separated.

"I love you," he said.

"I always wondered what it would be like."

He held her away from him for a moment. "And now?"

"I know. The wonder is still there, but it's another kind. The wonder of knowing why a bird sings, a flower blooms, a child runs. The wonder of counting time till you come. And the greatest wonder of all—you!"

He spoke the words of lovers everywhere, and she replied in kind. A silver moon rode the sky, the night was calm, the night was at peace. And in a moment, peace died.

It died in the flare of a thousand fire bombs, in the thunder of a thousand shrapnel bombs, in the terrifying rattle of machine guns, and the wail of the wounded and dying.

Dane threw Jan-t to the ground and covered her quivering body with his own. He knew then what Mura had done. Mura had built flying ships. Not many, perhaps, but enough. Probably a half dozen small ones. Even as he hauled Jan-t to her feet, his mind continued to dwell on what else Mura might have done. There was enough metal in the transport's hold to make a dozen tanks; it would be child's play to the technicians. Planes and tanks. Riffin's fifty thousand warriors, the jungle fastness, none of it had meaning now.

He became aware of Jan-t's tortured voice. "Dward! Where is he?"

Dane remembered. The boy had dashed into the square to join other children at play. He shaded his eyes against the glare of flame thrown off by the chemical bombs. Horror gripped him. A bomb had fallen into the midst of the group of children. A wave of sickness rose in him. There was only torn flesh strewn about where there had once been children. He heard Jan-t's gasp of terror; tried to stop her but she was away before he could grasp her again.

She was on her knees, her face covered by her hands. "Oh, Dward! Dearest brother...he was a baby..."

THE WHOLE jungle seemed aflame. He stood, a tall, gaunt-faced man, and watched the flames. They were too far now to hear the sounds of terror and of pain. But having heard it once, it was hard to

forget. Jan-t sat on a log. Her face was void of expression. She seemed in shock. Dane turned away with a sigh. Over. Mura had won.

He kneeled down before the girl. "Jan-t," he said gently. "You must listen."

Her face seemed frozen.

"He couldn't have suffered. It was over before he knew what struck him. There was mercy in that."

"Mercy?" Her eyes were sudden pools of hatred. "Where is the mercy in the murder of women and children? Our whole world was at peace till you came."

"Jan-t!"

The shocked surprise in his voice broke the spell she was in. Her lips parted, and two tears spilled over the lids of her eyes and rolled down her cheeks. Then, she was in his arms, crying out her grief in tortured sounds.

"There, there," he murmured. "That's it! Cry it out."

Later, they followed a path through the forest. She was in the lead. She told him the path led to one of the secret places where the women and children had been while Riffin and the others had retreated before Mura. Mention of Riffin's name set Dane to thinking of the whereabouts of the man, and what had happened to the small army of warriors Riffin had assembled. He became so lost in thought, he almost knocked her from her feet when she stopped suddenly in a listening attitude.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Listen..."

It was a clanking sound, and with it, though in the background, many crashing sounds as of falling trees.

"I was right," he said. "I thought Mura might do it. Tanks. And I'm willing to bet they're both projectile

firing and flame throwing. Damn! How far off do you make them to be?"

"Close. Listen.... Quickly. I see one."

He saw it, too. It wasn't as large as even a small Martian tank, but for the purpose Mura needed of it, it was sufficient. Then, he saw another, and a third. They were sweeping directly across their path. He knew, also, that there were men behind those tanks. Now, one of them headed directly toward them, the twin spotlights breaking a path of light before it. Another moment, and he and Jan-t would be revealed.

Before she divined his intention, he slammed a fist to her jaw. She fell without a sound. He took a second to bend low and whisper, "Good-bye, my love." Then, he was moving forward, arms overhead in a gesture of surrender. He knew she was safe. She lay behind a log, out of sight.

"I'VE SPENT sleepless hours thinking of the many ways I would devote to your torture," Mura said. He stood before Dane, his clenched fists on his hips. "Traitor! Renegade!"

Dane's hands were fastened behind his back. His face was puffed and raw from the beating the guards had given him on Mura's order when Dane had first been brought before him. Then, Mura stopped the guards. There were other methods of torture.

"You have made it impossible to meet our deadline!" Mura continued.

Somehow, Dane managed a smile.

"You're amused? Good. You found new friends, a new loyalty, perhaps a new love? See if your funny bone is provoked at this: The war has turned toward victory for Mars. Rama is sending a dozen destroyers to me. He promises more later. There

is a price on your head, Dane. I make you a promise: No one will ever collect it. I shall see to it."

"Why do you tell me this?" Dane mumbled through swollen lips.

"The cause you espoused is doomed to failure. I win all the way around. Rama will get his hundred thousand slaves."

"You should know better than that," Dane said. It was so damned hard to talk, and so useless. But you had to pretend. "These people will never give in to you. Especially after the ship and tank raid. They'll die to the last."

"A pity. I think I will enjoy watching them. Rama took off the deadline, but he still wants his slave labor. He is thinking of reconstruction."

So Mura had won, Dane thought wearily. Then, the comforting thought: He had won, but he had not stopped Dane from learning of a woman's love, and returning it.

Mura wondered at the sudden twisted smile on Dane's lips. "With a dozen destroyers at my use, they will eat humble pie," Mura said. "Have no doubt of that. Well, I must not tire you. There is tomorrow and a hundred tomorrows to follow. Take this thing away and throw it in a cell!"

They dragged Dane from the room. Mura stared at the bloody streaks Dane's bare heels had made. There was a pensive smile on his mouth.

THEY WERE shadows in the moonlight. The shadows resolved into the shapes of half-naked warriors. Not many—only a dozen. And between them, a woman. She knelt and made marks on a smooth bit of earth with a pointed stick.

"The cells are here. Twenty of them in a row. Dane is in the last cell close to the far wall."

Riffin squatted beside Jan-t and nodded with each word. Ever cautious since the night of terror when his men had died by the thousands and the back of his army had been broken by the firepower of the tanks and ships, he voiced an objection: "We don't have the men, Jan-t."

"We have them where they will do the most good—in the enemy's stronghold. Now, we know how close to starvation they really were. So they use our men as slaves, to bring food, to serve them and labor for them. Good! They are proud men, these Martians, scornful of us. How right my beloved was. Once he said to me: 'Vanity is a crooked mirror'. They are the victors, Riffin, but their victory is still empty. To use our friends, they had to put them under the same machine Dane placed me under. There are many of us now who understand their talk. We will show them how crooked their mirror is, Riffin.

"This is my plan: The slaves go out at sunset to gather the fruit and vegetables. They come close to the forest. There will be a number of warriors concealed in the tall grass. The others will pass the baskets to the warriors who will then pass into the compound. Our friends on the inside know of my plan. They will help the warriors free Dane."

"But how will the warriors bring weapons into the compound?" another asked.

"The women have sewn pouches on the inside of the warriors' breech skins. I don't think more than a knife will be needed."

"True. If the surprise is sudden, and the men work swiftly."

"I impressed them with the need of speed."

"And if they don't succeed?" Riffin asked.

Her voice was level, and none knew

the heartbreak behind it: "The warriors will die. But they will spare my man—for the sport they have in torturing him. Now, I must return to help the women."

The men continued to squat before the scratched plan she had drawn on the ground. One spoke without lifting his head: "I do not like to be led by a woman."

There were mutters of assent with the protest.

"It is against tribal custom," said another.

"Tribal custom has been placed in the discard," Riffin said. Of them all, he had the most right to protest, for he had given up the rights and privileges of headman when Jan-t took over. "When I let Dane lead us, the fighting was always in our favor. But I was taken in by the enemy's strategy and foolishly played into their hands. We were put to flight, our women and children killed, our men taken into slavery. It was Jan-t who has brought us together again, Jan-t who made order out of chaos, and again Jan-t who has shown us to the path of courage. I felt no sorrow or loss when I gave her my tribal right. She has not failed us in any way. Shall we be small in our wishes if she wants the man of her choosing to fight at her side? What is more, if her plan succeeds, Dane will be with us again to lead the fight. I say let her continue doing man's work, so long as there is no man who can take her place."

The silence which followed Riffin's impassioned words was broken by the first man who had voiced his dislike of following a woman: "I did not see the whole of it. You are right, Riffin. Well, let us do the things we have to do...."

THE DISH of food slid through the slot in the door. Dane handled

it with care. Only yesterday, he had allowed the dish to slip from his fingers, and the thought of having to wait another day to eat was unbearable.

He started to turn when he heard whispered words: "Tonight. Be ready."

He was almost afraid to speculate on the meaning of the words. Was this another form of torture? Mura was quite capable of engineering a fake escape just to watch the painful letdown.

Tonight? It was already evening. When in the night? Dane began to shake. Stop it! He forced the will of his mind to make his muscles and nerves obey. He must not give way, not after showing an unbreakable spirit to all Mura's attempts to break it down. No, he must not give way now!

He ate the greasy, ill-prepared food to the last bit, even licking the watery gravy from the bottom of the plate. Horrible as the food was, it provided needed energy, maintained a semblance of life in his wasted body. But more than food, of greater need, had been the whispered words. They were food for the soul and spirit. Now, there was a reason for patience. Dane shambled to the far corner, from where he could watch the moon come up, and huddled there, waiting for the moment of deliverance.

First, he heard the clomping sound of boots, and seconds later the door opened wide. The corridor between cells was gloomy, ill-lighted, but he could make out the forms of uniformed guards and, huddled in a close group, the half-naked figures of four natives.

"Don't be all night about cleaning up," one of the guards said.

Another of the guards sniffed audibly, gasped: "Phew! This place needs deodorizing. What a stink!"

"Once a week he gets it. Were I Mura, I would let the traitor rot in his foulness. Well, get on with it, you..."

One of the two natives who came in carried a pail and mop, the second a handful of cloths. Two of the guards also came in to stand guard at either side of the door. One of the remaining guards called to Dane: "Out here!" Then, as Dane followed the order, "Up against the wall."

Dane found his breath coming painfully, and what was this sudden pounding of his heart?

"All right, you two," the squad leader said, "get to work on the floor."

DANE LET his head fall so that he could watch the natives without being observed. He caught the sudden sharp look one of them sent him. It was a signal of some sort. He let his head move in a slight nod. The native looked away. But Dane knew the man had seen him shake his head.

Dane steeled his will and body to the work ahead. "Why do they treat me like this?" he whined to the guards. He hoped they would not suspect his change of way. These were the first words of self-pity he had uttered in all the days of his imprisonment.

The leader turned from watching the natives at work and called to his friend, making the other turn also: "Ho! Our stinking friend has a new tune to sing. Mura will be pleased to hear it."

It was amazing with what swiftness the natives moved. Their hands flashed in and out of their breechskins, and steel glinted momentarily. One of the guards grunted softly, the other died without a sound.

"Quickly, Dane," one of the natives commanded. "Strip the uniform from

one of them."

But Dane was already thinking ahead. "Get in there and take care of the other two! And get their uniforms."

It was the work of a minute to don the dead man's uniform. And another minute to drag the dead bodies into the cell Dane had quitted. There, he saw his friends had already helped themselves to the uniforms of the two who had stepped into their trap. One of the natives smiled, dipped his hand into the pail and pulled it free. Water dripped from the steel blade of a knife.

"For you," the man said. "Jan-t's idea."

It was the first words he had heard of her, the first to let him know she was even alive. "Jan-t? Her idea?" Dane seemed unable to grasp what had been said.

"Yes. She is our leader since your capture. But we don't have time to talk. What about this one here?" He kicked at the remaining uniformed figure.

"Better let him keep what he has on," Dane said. "Best if two of you go out as you came in. Don't forget the pail and things."

IT WAS THE longest walk Dane had ever taken. Yet, it was only a matter of walking from the cell block to the gate. But there were at least two dozen guards he and the others had to pass. He was thankful the moon had set. Now, they were at the last barrier, the gate. He had managed to get this far by will power alone, and now he had to make a last effort. To hesitate, or even slow down in his approach to the guards at the gate would look suspicious. He had to wipe the look of pain and fatigue from his face, and place in their stead the cold, indifferent expression of a squad leader taking a couple of na-

tives out of the compound. There was only the long-shot risk of being recognized.

One of the gate guards looked up, said: "Disposal squad?"

"Yes," Dane replied firmly. "This one," he pointed to the native who had no burden, "claimed he saw something at the edge of the forest. We're going to have a look."

"They see a shadow and think it's got two swords and a blast gun. But that's the way the ignorant animals are. Pass."

Dane breathed again only when the two who were in uniform were clear of the gate. Passing them through had been his biggest worry. Now, even if they were watched, it would be impossible to guess their intentions. And once they were close to the forest, they couldn't be stopped.

The first one Dane saw of the welcoming group who had been waiting for them at the edge of the forest, was Riffin. Dane had but a single question to ask of him: "Where is Jan-t?"

"Come," Riffin said. "I will take you to her. She is counting the heartbeats till your arrival."

TIME STOOD still while they embraced. He pushed her away after a while and looked searchingly into her face. She had changed. He had left a girl, and had come back to a woman. A wan smile lighted her features. Her fingers continued to stroke his cheeks and lips as if to assure herself of the reality of his being there.

"Loved one," she whispered. "Do you think the time will ever be when we can know peace?"

"Yes," he said confidently. "When we drive them from this planet."

She sighed. "I'm so afraid. I wasn't afraid before. Perhaps it's be-

cause I can't bear the thought of losing you again. But I keep thinking of this Rama you told me about. If we should kill or get rid of those who are here, might he not send others?"

"Not if what I have in mind works. No, Rama has just finished with a war which has been going on for fifty years. He'll call it a cheap investment to lose a dozen or so ships and five or six thousand men, to find he might lose ten times that and still not win."

"I don't understand."

"I know you don't understand," he said. "Nor will I explain now. For the present, I would like—"

She caught him just in time to ease him to the ground as he fainted. Then, she was calling for help, and shortly after, gentle hands carried him to a nearby hut.

HE DID NOT know how long he remained under the care of the old women. But he had slept twice for long periods, and it seemed he could never get enough food into his belly. His appetite was ravenous. Slowly and surely, strength returned to him. But he made no attempt to get about until he felt sure he could manage, for he knew once he took the first step toward his goal, there would be no return.

It was night again when he left the hut and appeared before the circle of warriors Jan-t had called together at his urging. The hum of their voices died as he stepped within the circle and lifted his hands for silence.

"My friends. Jan-t has told me you are willing to accept my leadership. I promise I will not fail you, though the way will be long and hard. We are leaving this land and going to the ruined city which lies deep in the jungle. Our enemies will not find us easily there, and there I am sure is a secret I can unlock."

The brown faces turned to one an-

other with wonder in their eyes. Dane waited for a few seconds, then continued: "Fire is best fought with fire. The fuel for our fire lies buried in the ruins of the city. We march with the dawn. I have sent runners to our friends who lie in hiding. They will join us there. Now, go and make ready."

Later, when they were alone, Jan-t asked Dane what he meant.

"The machine recorded the fact that science was in full bloom when Chicago was at its greatest glory. Well, unless we can fight Mura with weapons akin to his, we lose before we begin. Now, it's my belief that the science we may need to build those weapons, lies buried in the ruins of the city." He smiled ruefully. "I'm not fool enough to think your simple people can become proficient craftsmen in the short time we have. But I do think that I will be able to teach them what I have to."

"And what is that?"

He patted her shoulder. "Let it come as a surprise," he suggested. "My one hope is that it will be as much a surprise to Mura."

THE PRISONER lay spread-eagled, tied wrist and ankle to stakes. His labored breathing was the only sound to be heard. Mura's footsteps were muffled by the earth floor as he paced the room.

"Once more," Mura grated. "There has to be one who'll break."

The whip wielders stepped back a pace and uncoiled their whips. Then, there was the sharp terrifying sound of their contact with the naked flesh of the prisoner. The man shuddered, moaned, then heaved helplessly against his bonds. Again the metal thongs laid themselves in red ribbons over his back.

"Talk, talk now, damn you!" Mura growled. "Where is Dane and the

others? Where have they gone to? What are they up to?"

A tortured silence gave him answer.

"Throw some water over him," Mura said after a while. "Keep whipping him until he talks—or dies. I want to know where the natives have gone."

Mura stalked from the room, his face frozen in anger and frustration. I made a mistake, he thought, as he walked slowly back to his quarters. I should have had Dane executed. He was always clever, too clever, and now he is mixing some sort of unpleasant potion for us to drink, damn him! If only I could make one of these naked animals talk? Ten days he's been gone. I'm sure he's behind this sudden disappearance of the natives.

He looked up suddenly and saw he had reached his quarters. His bird-of-prey face, made even more so by the last ten days of tense waiting, was taut as a guy wire. He fell into the chair behind his desk with a despairing sigh.

He looked up at the sound of footsteps, and saw it was a runner. The man saluted, and held out a message. It was from the communications officer aboard his ship, and the message read simply and to the point. The twelve destroyers Rama had promised were on their way.

He didn't know whether it was good news or not. Rama still wanted a hundred thousand slaves, but now it was for rebuilding the ravages of war on Mars. And although Rama had taken off the time limit, Mura felt certain he wouldn't be given too long a time for collecting the hundred thousand. How could he tell Rama that not only was he not bringing in new prisoners, he was losing those he had by revolt, by refusal to work, self-starvation and suicidal at-

tempts at escape?

The whole thing was a mess. He had to find out where Dane and the natives had gone. And this time, there would be no fooling with Dane!

Again there was the sound of footsteps. It was the chief of the prison guards. "The native talked. This fish was weaker than the others."

Mura slapped the desk with an open palm. "Good! I thought we'd get to one who'd break! Well?"

"They're holed up in the ruins of the Earth city that lies in the heart of the jungle."

Mura remembered the name. It had appeared time and time again in the records of the memory machine they had used on a number of the natives. Chicago! The taut look loosened, but the dark eyes were still brooding and the lips as tight as ever. Well, now that they knew, it shouldn't take long to get to them. He'd teach them what revolt meant. And with the thought came the answer to his dilemma.

All he had to do was let Rama know the natives had revolted. Mura had no doubt of his instructions then. Crush the revolt! He began issuing orders rapidly.

DANE WAS amazed at how much had been accomplished in the week they had been at work. Yet, it wasn't enough. He had found what he had hoped to, deep in the heart of the ruins, and had used whatever machinery he could. Hidden in great underground workshops were immense machines which could shape and finish small space craft. He had also found smaller shops in which tools were available for the constructing of atomic engines for the ships. The trouble was, there was not enough metal available.

His eyes went to the door at the far end of the room. Riffin and another man were moving swiftly to-

ward the table at which he was busied in his plans. One look at Riffin's face, and Dane knew something had happened.

"Mura knows where we have gone," Riffin called while he was still several yards away. "He is assembling a force against us."

Dane tried to put himself in Mura's position. It would have to be an all-out effort, using everything and every kind of weapon. That meant tanks and ships. Dane grinned wryly. He knew a surprising amount of what had been going on in the compound during the last week. Mura had built fifty wooden space ships. These had to be coated with heat-impregnable paint. But that hadn't been done yet. Mura was probably waiting until the other fifty were completed. But Mura had also built four metal ships, small ones, but effective against ground forces. He had also constructed a total of ten tanks.

"How far along are they?" he asked.

"They are ready to march."

"We must hold them back for two more days," Dane said. "Here is what must be done. Assemble all your archers and take them to the compound." He thought a moment. "Can you get there by nightfall?"

"It depends on how many men you want?"

"Let's say a hundred."

"Yes."

"Good! This is a suicide mission, Riffin. Here's what I want done. At nightfall, I want the men to lay a barrage of fire arrows into the compound. Try to hit the workshops where they are building the flying ships, and also shoot fire arrows into the ships already built. I want them destroyed."

"They should make a fine fire," Riffin said thoughtfully.

"I hope so," Dane said. "In the

meantime, I will send out all available men to harrass those marching against us. We must stall them for a few days."

"Do you think you will finish in a couple of days?" Riffin asked.

"I hope to. The wooden ships will be done and all their parts. It's the metal ship I need that worries me. Without the control we are building, they will not fly."

Very little of what Dane was doing made sense to Riffin. Riffin knew Dane was building a metal ship in which would be housed a control over the wooden ships. This control would steer the ships, fire the guns they had, and work the tiny engines which would make them fly.

"What if Mura sends his flying ships over the ruined city and sends down the fire bombs?" Riffin asked.

"I expect him to. But these shops are deep underground. The metal gate which leads to the surface is fire-proof, at least against what Mura has. That's why I did not bring our flying ships to the surface."

Riffin was silent for several seconds. "You are an outcast. They will kill you, Dane, if they capture you."

"They will not capture me," Dane said. "I promise you that."

"And I promise you this," Riffin said. "I will kill you first, Dane. I have grown to love you as I would my own son. I have been told what they did to you while you were in their hands. They won't do it again."

"Thank you, Riffin. But never mind me. Just make sure they never take Jan-t. Mura is an animal. And he has not forgotten her."

Riffin's strong handclasp spoke more than words.

THE FIRE was out at last. The technicians had finally manufactured a fire extinguisher after a full day's work. Mura looked at

charred embers of what had been fifty flying ships and cursed in a steady flow of foul language. A month of labor had gone into the construction of those ships. Now, there were not enough slave laborers left to build new ones. It was a lucky thing, Mura thought, that the shops and barracks were of a metal impervious to heat.

But a full day had been wasted in fighting the fires.

Well, might as well wait the coming of the ships from Mars. He was still in command. And he was going to use his authority to the fullest. A task force of vengeance. The transport and technicians could go back to Mars, but his own destroyer and those coming to reinforce his would be used to destroy the enemy, to the last man.

But first, he had to plan something fool-proof. This raid with the fire arrows, for instance, had been planned in advance. Why? It was hard to say. Dane had the advantage of having had men in the other camp. He had none, Mura thought ruefully. But he had been trained in war, Dane only partly so. What was it Dane expected to gain by destroying the ships? It was a hard question to answer. But why trouble looking for an answer?

Dane had planned the campaign before his capture. It had been successful, too, until overconfidence on someone's part ruined the plan. Mura thought for a couple of moments on how Dane might plan this new campaign.... There was only one answer: The same way as the last; fight a retreating, harrying action. The natives took advantage of every bit of cover; they knew every foot of ground. If he set out on foot to the ruined city, he might not have enough men to gain his objective when he did get there.

Suddenly, he smiled. The solution was really quite simple. The transport.

It could carry a thousand men and their equipment. Maybe even a couple of tanks. All he had to do would be to parachute them to the ground. Really quite simple, Mura thought, as he began to put his plan into action.

"HOW MUCH longer?" Jan-t asked.

"Just a little bit," Dane replied. He gave silent thanks for the coil of covered cable he had found. It was as fresh and clean as the day it had been made.

"I didn't want to disturb you," she went on. "But Riffin sent a runner back with some strange news."

He was bent low over the work bench, "So...?"

"Twelve flying ships landed in the huge meadow outside the compound," she said.

"I expected those, soon or late."

"Yes, you said so. But what do you make of this? Riffin has observed them loading tanks into the large ship you came in."

It was like Dane to finish his work before taking on a new job. And there was no question that the news Riffin had sent meant a complete change of plan. The question was, how much time was left to him? "Is it still day?" he asked.

"Yes, but not for long. And it's going to be a moonless night."

"An augury of good," he replied. "So Mura is loading tanks into the transport. H'mm! I think I know what he plans. He's not going to risk a march. No, he's going to parachute his men and even some tanks to the ground. Well, we've got to be aloft to meet his ships when they come. The best time for him to make his attack will be just before dawn. Military strategy is inherent in his nature. He won't deviate from his way of thinking. First, he will drop fire bombs,

and perhaps an hour later, just after sunrise, drop the men and tanks. There will be light enough then, plus the terror of the fire bombs.

"If I'm wrong about the time—"

She knew what he meant. Her arms went about him in an impulsive gesture, but there was nothing impulsive in the kiss she gave him. "You won't be wrong," she said.

"And if I were, you wouldn't admit it, would you?" he asked.

She gave him a gentle smile.

"I'd better get the men to wheel this boat to the gate," he said. "That was the last of the job. Finished. Except, of course, that the darned thing has to fly."

She looked up at the rounded expanse of silvery metal. One of Dane's trained workmen was putting on the last plate to cover the hole into which the cable had gone, and another was waiting to weld the plate to the metal around it. She made up her mind on the instant.

"I'm going with you!" she said.

"You are not!"

"Why not?"

"I won't let you take the chance."

"That's not an answer."

He took her in his arms and bent her head back until she was looking straight up into his eyes. "I found my love in another world," he said gently. "The kind of love men dream about. I'll come back for you, because you're the woman I want. What kind of love is it that would risk your life? I can't let you come with me."

"And what kind of love is it that would be without you?" she countered. "As empty as a sky without sun, moon, or stars. I could never smell a flower, see a sunrise or sunset, that I wouldn't think of you. I did not go through the eternity of torture waiting for you just to have you go away again without me."

SHE HAD been right about the night. Dane peered through the control tower window into the black void of evening. Everything had gone well. He searched the night sky about him with narrowed, inquisitive eyes. He smiled suddenly. The night was neither completely black nor completely void. A myriad of lights, like a vast swarm of fireflies, pinpointed the darkness and filled the void. His armada of ships.

His armada of decoys....

They could fly, they could fire what seemed to be guns, but they were only the shells of ships. They were painted the same color as his, the ship he was on, they were the same size.

But his ship was of metal; the few guns it possessed were real and terribly powerful. His ship could be maneuvered and flown at terrific speed. He fingered the array of buttons at his finger tips. Each button represented a ship. He could control their every action by pressing those buttons.

Yes, the others were his decoys, but it was going to take Mura a while to discover that. And by that time, it would be too late, Dane hoped.

THE COMMANDER of the twelve destroyers was with Mura in the control room of Mura's own ship. Mura pointed to the transport lazying along in the night sky.

"The commander has orders which, when followed to the letter, will destroy every living being both in the ruined city and wherever he finds it."

"A large order," the other observed.

"The one sure way of breaking a revolt is by killing it off completely, root and all."

"Rama is not interested in a new space war," the commander said.

"New space war? These natives couldn't construct a wheel, much less

space ships. But they must be punished, and Dane must be punished."

So that was what lay behind this war of vengeance, the other thought. Dane! Well, there seemed no question about Dane's being a traitor. Curiosity impelled him to ask: "What strange reason did Dane have for his actions?"

"A foolishness about liberty and slavery," Mura said. "Think of it. A man raised in the glory of war and death for one's planet, and suddenly he reverts to childish prattle about liberty and slavery. Of course, the woman involved resolved the whole thing."

"A woman?"

Mura grinned. "A lovely piece—for a native. Not like our Martian women, understand. But good enough for the lonely nights. Strange," he mused, "I never thought that Dane might have been one of those so seldom met with these days, an introvert. I thought the psychotechnicians had pretty well adjusted humanity. But then, Dane lived in a world of science. Probably never had known too many women. And, as I say, she was rather pretty."

"Sometimes that excuse is enough."

"It seemed to have served for him."

"Well, let's get back to what you've planned. First, we sow the seeds of fire bombs...."

"Yes. We'll need light until the sun comes to our aid. Coming in daylight would have warned them. The jungle will blaze like dry tinder. There will be enough room to land the men and supplies by afternoon."

"Sure about that?"

"If not, tomorrow will do. Either way, there won't be many who will escape."

"No, I guess not. Ah, well, Rama said you were efficient enough...."

DANE'S EYES were wide. He put his fingers against the earphones

and strained his senses to what he had heard. Now, it was more clear. The pulsing sound of engines. He flicked the switch that put on the tracer-system. Light glowed on a glass-like surface spread before his face. Now, tiny sparks of light came alive on the surface and began moving toward the center.

"The enemy, Jan-t," he said crisply. "Those lights represent a ship each. Fourteen lights, fourteen ships. They are not coming in fast, perhaps a couple of hundred miles an hour. Mura must have taken them into the upper sphere and is diving them under control. About ten more seconds."

She took her eyes from the glowing glass-like thing and brought them to bear on the rows of buttons. She saw his fingers hovering over them. Then she became aware he was counting aloud:

"Five - six - seven - eight - nine - ten! Now!"

His fingers seemed to dance along the rows of buttons. Something caught her eye as it passed swiftly. She followed the course the thing had taken and saw it was one of Dane's ships. It was headed straight away from them. Suddenly, it threw off tiny sparks. She could not hear the sound of guns, but knew they were being fired.

Guns that were empty of destruction—sound without fury.

Then, the whole sky was ablaze. She saw one, then another, and a third fall in a great blaze of light. She held her breath. Were they all to go that way, even Dane's ship?

MURA PACED the deck like a madman. He had already lost the transport and six destroyers. If he could only find Dane's own ship. Damn him! Every ship they fought looked alike....

"They've got another," said his guest. The man's eyes were puckered

In wonder. Mura had said nothing about meeting resistance in the air.

"How did he do it, the renegade?"

Mura stormed.

"I'm sure I don't know. A few words of advice, Mura. Better contact Rama; he might not like this."

"To the devil with Rama!" Mura raged, his voice out of control now.

"What are you saying, man?" the other man asked in horror. "That's treason."

"I don't care what it is," Mura said. He seemed possessed.

"Look, you fool," the commander pointed again. "They've just knocked out another ship..."

"But we've knocked fifty of theirs from the sky," Mura pointed out.

"And they have as many left. The odds are against us."

"Damn the odds! I'll fight to the last ship and man."

There was no question that Mura had gone mad, the other thought. He took a backward step, then another. With the third, his fingers were on the door knob. But before he could turn it, Mura whirled. Mura's blast gun came out of its holster like a streak of light. The sound of its explosion rocked the room. But where there had been a man against a door, nothing now stood. Not even a door.

Now, there would be no one to interfere, Mura thought as he turned.

He became aware suddenly that his ship was being chased. The speaking tube became alive with sound. He gave orders quickly and crisply, then went to the firing chart. It was as if he had a sixth sense. He put the speaker on so that he could give orders to the remainder of his fleet while he fought against Dane. It was as if he had been told. Only Dane knew his ship. This was no chance encounter.

"Mura... This is Dane. Mura..."

The words came out of the com

speaker. Dane was tuned in on their wave length.

"Yes?"

"This is the end. You know what I mean."

"To hell with you, Dane!" Mura grated. "I'm going to knock you out of the sky."

"No, you're not," Dane said. "You're not, because you'll never catch me. The ships of Mars are not made like this one. The Earthmen knew how to build fighting craft. Mura, you're a fool! You've been fighting wooden decoys. Think back, man..."

The receiver was silent now. Suddenly, a dozen falling ships flashed before Mura's eyes in retrospect. He remembered other things. But, it was impossible to think that a single ship had caused such havoc.

"Wooden decoys," Dane's voice came in again. "Which one is my ship?"

"**H**OW MANY do we have left?" Jan-t asked.

"Twenty-five, maybe thirty," Dane replied. "But there are only five left of theirs."

"You're chasing Mura's ship, aren't you?" She had been afraid to ask.

"Yes! I've got to get him. If he goes down, we win. This is the first chance I've really had at him. This is it, my dear."

"You won't lose. I know it now!"

This was the test, Dane knew. He had deliberately warned Mura. He wanted Mura to know who it was chasing him, wanted him to know this was a personal duel.

He caught a swift glimpse of a trailer point on the firing chart. The ship bucked as the guns threw a broadside. Missed! Mura was a clever pilot, all right. Once more Dane felt the ship buck as the starboard guns

let loose, but once more Mura got away. He had to get in close.

The ship bucked again. His eyes went wide. He hadn't fired. The puzzle was solved quickly. Voices bawled to him over the ship's system. They had been hit. He asked how badly; was told a hole had been blown forward of amidships. He issued orders for the emergency crew to get to work, and wondered as he did how effective their work would be. He had worked miracles of training, but would it be enough?

The ship had been hit again! This one was bad. Fire in the engine room. If the fire ever reached the controls, it would be the end!

He caught sight of a wildly spinning needle. They were losing speed. Ten more seconds, and they would be at a stalling speed. There was only one more thing to do.

THERE it was, straight ahead. A couple of seconds more. He held the throttle down all the way in a wild dive of power. Mura's ship grew larger and larger in his view-chart. Larger and larger, until it filled the whole chart. Split seconds now. Then, it was no longer in the chart.

His finger pressed the firing switch.

Mura's nerve had failed at the last second. He saw Dane's ship coming in at him head-on. Mura knew he had hit the ship twice, and maybe a third time. Dane was going to attempt

a suicide crash, Mura thought. His reflexes worked before he could stop them. He swerved away just in time.

Just in time to get a full broadside from Dane.

The ship dissolved in a sheet of orange flame!

DANE WAS braking his ship in carefully. They were still in danger. But at least the enemy was no longer in sight. With Mura's loss, the others had fled. He sighed in relief as they landed with only a slight shudder.

"Do you think they'll come back?" Jan-t asked.

"No!" He was sure. "There is no reason for Rama to risk it. I know Rama. The Earth means nothing to him, Mars means all. He fought Venus because she attacked. Rama will write this off the books."

"Dane, dear lover. What about us? I saw you at work. I know how you can do things. And now the science of that time is waiting for you."

"Science?" He seemed not to know the word. "There is only one science I wish to study from now on. The science of loving you."

She took her lips away from his. Her eyes were answering the laughter of his lips. "I think it's going to be a lot of fun—for both of us."

The warmth of his embrace proved his interest in the new field of science....

THE END

GANYMEDAN FARMER

By

A. T. KEDZIE

FROM THE numerous eulogies you've seen written to Heinlein, you've gathered no doubt that we think he's a first rate author. Unfortunately he's so wrapped up with interests ranging from juveniles to engineering that he hasn't much time for conventional science-fiction. His most recent juvenile, *Farmer In The Sky*, shows,

however, that he hasn't lost contact with s-f by any means. If anything, he's in there stronger than ever.

Heinlein is a man who works within a limited framework, the limitations however consisting only of those imposed by good writing, and, to a certain extent, by reasonable prognostications of the future.

No super-galactic epics of machines against men, no sixth dimensional invasions: just straight forward logical analysis of future problems built around human beings. These are the factors in Heinlein's writing, factors which tend to make him unique. Those other elements certainly have a legitimate place in science-fiction—that goes without saying, but until Heinlein came along, it seemed that the humbler elements, the basic elements of writing were neglected. Characterization is the key-note of Heinlein's writing.

We spoke of his recent preoccupation with juveniles. This is not quite correct, for although the books are aimed at readers beginning in the lower 'teens, they are fascinating reading for any s-f reader at all, nine or ninety! the recent *Farmer in the Sky* is a story perfectly described by the title. It concerns the problems and difficulties encountered in establishing a farming community on Ganymede, one of the moons of Jupiter. The dyed in the wool addict of the epic story might think this pretty calm sort of stuff, trite almost, but he'd be wrong, for there is a story there, definitely!

The story lays in making the problems so real, in placing them against such an authentically prognosticated background, that they're utterly believable. Now real-

ism of itself is not sufficient to carry a story, but when that realism is the realism of a hundred or two hundred years hence, it's another matter.

With incredible skill and with extraordinary accuracy, Heinlein portrays the efforts of the colonists to wrest a living as pioneers from Earth. Framed against concepts, ideas, and mechanisms of the future, the story is perfectly captivating. The word juvenile does not apply exactly.

The numerous technical details, in fact the enormous numbers of necessary technical details, are worked so cleverly into the story that they never intrude. They make the story without causing it to read like a technical treatise. And in that you have the crux of much of s-f's problem today. Since science is involved, how do you go about introducing it into a story without making the story subordinate? Actually, the answer is extremely simple: you learn to write like Heinlein!

This is a genuine plea to s-f writers now. Learn to write s-f so authentic that it reads like today's news. Yet include all the imaginative fancies of which it is capable of creating and sustaining. If you do that, you'll make a science-fiction reader out of everybody. Give us s-f with people, in a future background, motivated reasonably, and reeking with authenticity!

the MELTING ROCKET

By
SALEM LANE

AMERICAN scientists have a reputation for being experts in applied science—but, for the most part, laggards when it comes to pure theoretical design in fundamental work. Naturally this isn't true of everything. Some American scientists have done really basic work as, for example, Willard Gibbs, in creating the essentials of thermodynamics.

But we don't have to go back that far. Just consider the mid-twenties and the contribution made to theoretical rocketry by primarily American work. Everyone is familiar with that self-effacing genius, Dr. Robert Goddard. While the early science-fictionists were writing of rocketry and interplanetary travels, Dr. Goddard was working with rocket engines! While the German Rocket Society was still a gleam in its founders' eyes, Goddard was sending rockets into the air!

For some peculiar reason, Goddard preferred anonymity. Actually fame should have been his, for it was his work which stimulated the German Rocket Society and which laid the groundwork for our own work in rocket building. In addition, from Goddard's work an American really solved the basic problem of the rocket engine.

Early rockets had an apparently unquerable fault. Their reaction chambers, no matter of what alloy or refractory

they were made, burned out in a very short while. No material could stand the intense heat for more than a few minutes. That problem alone seemed insoluble. American and German technicians both tried liquid cooling, knowing that it would supply so much weight that it would be impractical. And the intense heat of the coming liquid-fueled rockets was still worse.

It remained for young James Wyld to provide the ultimate solution, one which is incorporated in every liquid-fueled rocket built including the V-2. He perfected the *regenerative* cooling system for the rocket! And like most fundamental ideas, it is almost painfully simple. He simply cooled the rocket chamber by surrounding it with a jacket through which the fuel is pumped before entering the chamber for combustion! No heavy cooling apparatus must be carried; no elaborate extras are necessary. The rocket engine literally cools itself—it cannot burn out, save for failure of the fuel pumps—a remote contingency.

You may wonder at the importance of such an idea. It must be clearly stated that in the whole of rocketry no single discovery or application has been of greater importance. Without regenerative cooling, rocketry as we know it now would not have been possible!

VAMPIRE of the DEEP

By Rog Phillips

**When he drew in his net he hoped
for a startling catch—but snared a living
girl who strangely had been dead for days!**

“D R. FRANK Richards?” Frank turned in the direction of the voice. The man who had spoken was short, rather timid looking. Hardly the type he had expected to see in a small town general practitioner, entirely out of character with his voice which was low and cultured.

“Yes,” he said cheerfully. “You’re Dr. Nelson, I take it.”

“That’s right,” Dr. Nelson said. “Here. I’ll take one of your bags.”

“No, that’s all right,” Frank said hastily. “I prefer to carry them both. They make a better balanced load. Which way’s your car?”

He followed Dr. Nelson through the crowded waiting room of the railroad depot. Outside a police sedan was at the curb, two uniformed men sitting in the front seat.

“We’re taking the prowler car,” Dr. Nelson said. “Oscar Freeman insisted, so I left my own car parked down at the station. We’ll go over to the hotel first so you can check in and maybe freshen up a bit. After lunch we can go down and talk to Oscar. He can tell you more about Jack Sprout than I gave you in my letter.”

“I had lunch on the train,” Frank said. “If you don’t mind I’d much rather go down now. My practice in New York is pretty demanding at

present. I don’t want to stay away longer than necessary.”

“All right,” Dr. Nelson said.

They got into the car.

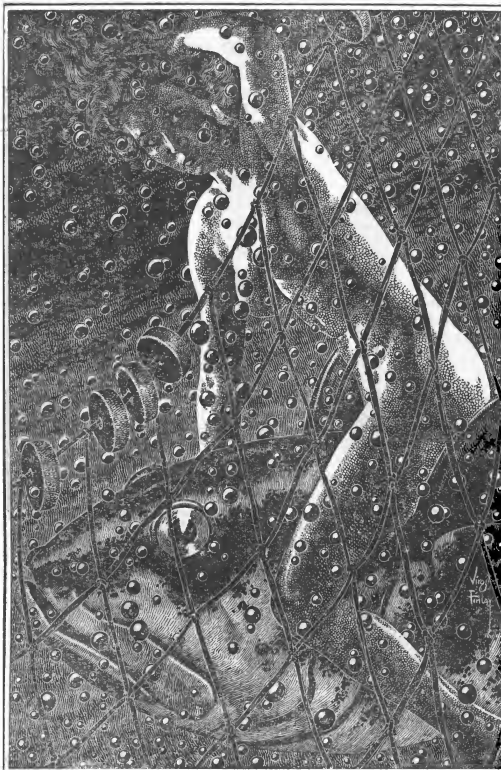
“I wouldn’t have thought of calling you about Jack Sprout,” Dr. Nelson said as the car got under way, siren screaming importantly, “except that I felt this thing was right in your line. I’ve read your book on the symbolism of the psychopathic escape from reality. A couple of your other books, too.”

“That’s good, doctor,” Frank said. “I suppose you’ve given this Oscar Freeman a sketch of my background so that I won’t have to waste any time on salesmanship.”

“He’s eager to give you a free hand in whatever you do,” Dr. Nelson said. “Small town police chief calls in famous New York specialist sort of thing. The buttons popped off his vest when he learned you had consented to come.”

Frank smiled at the ramrod stiff necks of the two men in the front seat. Nazi stormtroopers couldn’t have looked more military in the days of Hitler, and that siren could be heard beyond the city limits in every direction. Perhaps even out to the three mile limit at sea.

“Offhand I’m not so much interested in solving the murder as I am



As the net neared the surface, the figure of a girl astride a huge fish became visible...

in the mind of Jack Sprout," he said. "I gather from your letter that you and Freeman want me to get below the symbolism in his ravings and get him to confess. If I do that it will be only incidental to the study of the symbolism itself. Oscar Freeman might be disappointed in the results."

"I doubt if that would matter too much," Dr. Nelson said. "Up until this happened Jack Sprout was a very well liked young fisherman. Frieda Thorne—well, I don't think Oscar knows what she looked like. I have a sneaking hunch that if you could hand down some authoritative opinion that Jack Sprout was innocent Oscar would be more pleased than if you solved the murder. He'd be passing the buck to you, if you get what I mean."

The car drew up in front of a building made of dirty blocks of stone the same size as modern cinder blocks. It was a typical police station in a typical small town. Built at the same time as the railroad station way back when.

One of the men in the front seat leaped out and opened the rear door, holding it open importantly. Frank climbed out followed by Dr. Nelson. Frank started to take his two bags out of the car.

"Leave them in, doctor," the officer said respectfully. "We'll take them to the hotel and be right back. Only a minute."

"Thanks," Frank said.

HE FOLLOWED Dr. Nelson into the building, across a creaking, much varnished floor, through a couple of doors, and through a third door on which had been lettered quite ornately the legend, "Oscar Freeman, Chief of Police."

Frank received his second surprise. Oscar Freeman was not the rather oldish potbellied self-important char-

acter he had envisioned, but an instantly likeable and cleanly built man not over thirty. When they entered he stood up and came around his desk, holding out a hand in welcome.

Frank reached out to shake hands, felt something was wrong. He looked down at the hand he was shaking. It was a left hand. He looked at Oscar's right arm and saw that it ended with a curved hook instead of a hand.

"Lost it in the war," Oscar said pleasantly.

"If you two don't mind," Dr. Nelson said, "I'll run along. Couple of hospital cases I should look at before office hours. You can call me. Otherwise I'll drop over to the hotel this evening, Dr. Richards."

"WHAT DO you want first, doctor?" Oscar asked when the door closed. "See Jack? Or would you like all the dope on the case up to date?"

"The latter would be best, I think," Frank said. "The slant of a third party is often valuable."

He took a chair and lit a cigarette, settling back comfortably.

"Well," the police chief began, "it all began a week ago. We have a big tourist trade here. Three hotels with a total of a hundred and fifty rooms, and most of them filled during six months of the year. I can't keep track of all the tourists, naturally. I do remember noticing this girl, Frieda Thorne, however. Just one in the crowd in the lobby at the Cove Arms. A striking beauty of a type you seldom see. Skin satiny smooth, so smooth it almost seems it can't have any pores, yet with a healthy color. Lips the same way. Rather full but not too much so, and with the same satiny smooth texture. Lipstick that you would have sworn was a natural unpainted color. And maybe it was. Eyes maybe a little too large

for a normal person but just exactly right for her. I thought, 'Boy, that could be for me!' Then I promptly forgot about her. You know how it is, especially with a single man. You see a dozen every week you could fall in love with and marry, given half a chance." He looked down at the hook at the end of his right arm. "But you don't do anything about it. Especially here. They'd turn out to be married, or in love with another guy already, and anyway they'd all be accustomed to living on an income you could never hope to earn enough to pay the income tax on even."

"But I did ask the clerk what room she was in. That's how I know it was her."

"Dr. Nelson said you hadn't seen her," Frank said.

"You're the only one who knows I did except that room clerk and he probably forgot about it," Oscar said. "Anyway, it was two days later that she disappeared. It was an elderly woman who reported her missing. Claimed to be a very dear friend of Miss Thorne's, but I suspect she's just a casual hotel acquaintance of the type that instantly becomes your lifelong friend. You know the type. But she spread it on thick enough so that the hotel took a look in her room and found her clothes all there and the bed unslept in. That was good enough. They called me."

"Well," Oscar continued, "I figured no self respecting girl with a nice body would come to a resort town without a bathing suit, so I looked for one. It was missing. That made it slip into a neat pattern. Girl goes swimming, maybe alone, and drowns. Girl goes bathing, meets with foul play. Corpse lying somewhere along the beach. I send my boys and a couple dozen volunteers up and down the beach for several miles. Within an hour we locate the spot where her swim suit and

beach robe and sandals are laying in a neat pile. At first there seems no sign of foul play. Even though the spot is very secluded. It's the kind of a place a girl wanting to take a quick dip in the nude would pick.

"It isn't until I bring the stuff down here that I begin to suspect foul play. Here, I'll bring it out and you can discover for yourself."

Oscar got up and crossed to a safe. He brought out a bundle in a cellophane bag. He dropped it in Frank's lap and went over and sat down again, watching him with a half smile.

Frank stared at the bag. Inside was a folded two piece swim suit and a bath towel type of beach robe. He looked up at Oscar questioningly, then slid open the zipper. Immediately his eyes widened.

"It smells strongly of fish!" he said.

"I thought you'd notice," Oscar said with satisfaction. "And it wouldn't do that if she had just taken a dip and it had dried out. The only way it could get that strong a smell of fish is if it had been soaked in the bilge water of a fishing boat! And it would take several washings to get it out."

"I see," Frank said slowly. "And I can see how you concluded it must be foul play. And obviously if it were, her things could have been washed out and dropped in that secluded spot to make it seem she had taken a dip in the nude and been pulled out to sea by the tide. It would be the logical pattern for a fisherman who found himself getting into trouble that demanded he silence the girl. In itself probably foolproof."

"**L**OTS OF murders are foolproof if the initial setup is left alone," Oscar said. "The murderer has a conscience that bothers him, or he thinks the police suspect too much

and makes further moves to cover up imagined loopholes, and gets caught. I and my boys made a routine check-up of all the local fishing boats over the next two or three days, looking for signs of a struggle, or blood, or even a corpse, though we didn't expect to find one. No dice. We gave it up as a bad job. There were a couple of fishermen we could have brought in on suspicion to make a case and let the people know we're on the job. But hell, why bother?"

"Then Jack Sprout goes to pieces?" The police chief nodded agreement.

"I was waiting for that," Frank said, leaning forward and grinding out his cigarette. "Let me know as much as you can remember of how he looked and what he actually said."

"When we were looking over the boats Jack Sprout's boat was O.K.," Oscar said. "When I asked him the routine question of whether he had known the girl he readily admitted that she had gone out on a fishing trip with him about ten days before she had disappeared. He wouldn't admit to anything more than that. Claimed he hadn't seen her the day she vanished. But he was the only one of the fishermen who admitted even knowing her. I took it on myself to sort of circulate around during off-duty hours, seeing what I could pick up.

"It was Jeb Turner, the bartender down at the waterfront bar that gave me my first lead. He said that Jack Sprout had come in there one evening and started drinking pretty heavily. He ran out of money and hit Jeb up for credit so he could go on drinking. When Jeb asked him what had come over him that he wanted to get drunk like that Jack told him he had seen something out at sea. He muttered something about a girl in his nets. Jeb laughed about it and gave him credit, thinking Jack had just cooked up a

whopper as an excuse for getting himself good and tight.

"That was enough to bring him in for questioning. At first we couldn't get anything out of him. I decided I could do better by getting him drunk again. I released him and invited him to have a drink with me. We went down to the waterfront bar. I kept pushing drinks on him until he was pretty drunk. He was so drunk he could barely stay on the stool before he started talking. His story was rather weird.

"He said he hadn't even known Frieda was missing when he pulled in his net and saw her. She didn't have a stitch on, and was astride the back of the biggest old flounder he had ever seen. She got off its back and climbed aboard. Then she sort of doubled up, pressing her hands against her stomach. Water came out of her nose and mouth in a steady stream, then spurts. Finally she straightened up, breathing in deep gulps like a fish out of water. A couple of minutes of that and her breathing became normal. Then she bawled him out good for catching her and Bullza in his net. He said he apologized and turned over the net, releasing the big fish and all the rest of the catch. Then without a backward glance Frieda dived in. He watched where she disappeared, and shortly a lot of bubbles broke to the surface. The big fish had been swimming around near the surface. After the bubbles stopped it went down out of sight.

"Jack ran into the cabin and brought out his waterscope. That's a piece of stovepipe with a glass in one end. You stick it in the water and you can see right on down. Through that he claims he saw Frieda swim to the back of the flounder and get on. Then they swam away."

Oscar smiled smugly.

"I brought him back to the station

and booked him for being drunk," he said. He became serious again. "I didn't want to book him on suspicion of murder. In a small town that's bad. If you get off people keep on thinking you were guilty."

He stopped talking, watching Dr. Frank Richards expectantly.

"On the theory that Jack was too drunk to think up the story," Frank said thoughtfully, "I can see why Dr. Nelson thought it would interest me. He sensed a basic picture of this Jack Sprout falling in love with Frieda Thorne, being spurned, perhaps laughed at by this superior city girl who considered him just an ignorant fisherman, killing her in a fit of anger and humiliation, shoving the deed into his subconscious where even he can't pull it out, then rationalizing it with a fantastic dream. A dream he might very likely have had the next time he slept after killing her. It's a rather conventional pattern. Murder. The refusal of the conscious mind to accept the fact of murder. Shoving it into the subconscious and walling it in with symbolism. I think I would like to talk with him now."

JACK SPROUT was dressed in water repellent levis, heavy shoes, and a brown woolen shirt open at the neck; all showing signs of wear. His face, neck, and bare arms had the kind of tan a fisherman gets in his open boat under the sun with salt breezes whipping at him. His face was thin, the thinness accentuated by the heavy thatch of black hair that spilled over, covering his ears and seeming never to have known any other comb than the careless fingers its owner ran through it to get it back from his eyes.

He looked at Frank without curiosity, then turned to Oscar.

"That 'was a dirty trick, Oscar," he said. "Getting me drunk and lock-

ing me up for being drunk."

"I wanted you where I could find you, Jack," Oscar said, grinning. "This is Dr. Richards. Otherwise known as Frank. He's interested in what you said about seeing Frieda with that fish."

Jack glanced at Frank again, dismissed him with his eyes, then turned his attention back to the police chief.

"Are you turning me loose, Oscar?" he said. "You'd better. There's a storm brewing. I've got to make my boat secure."

"That's up to Frank," Oscar said. "He's the boss here. Came down from New York. What he says goes. If he says lock you up again and keep you there till you rot," he shrugged his shoulders resignedly, "I'll have to do it. If he says turn you loose I'll have to do that. Better be nice to him."

Jack Sprout turned back to Frank with new interest in his eyes. He studied him from under his heavy black eyebrows. He turned back to Oscar.

"So that's the way it is, huh?" he said. "You think I'm crazy. Well I'm not. I know what I saw and heard." He turned back to Frank with a sneer twisting at his lips. "But if your idea of being crazy is anyone who sees something nobody else has ever seen, then I'm crazy according to you, and you'll order me locked up for the rest of my life, I guess."

"Not at all," Frank said. "As a matter of fact, I don't think you are crazy."

"Huh?" Jack said, startled.

Frank smiled disarmingly. "I'm more interested in what you saw," he said. "I write books about unusual things like that. Things that sound so crazy sometimes the one who saw them gets locked up because everyone thinks he really is crazy. You might say I'm just the opposite of the doctors that lock people up. There

are quite a few people running around loose right this minute that would still be behind bars in some state hospital if I hadn't stepped in and investigated what they claimed to have seen or heard."

"And if I don't talk about it?" Jack asked.

"I hope you will," Frank said. "I'd like to meet Frieda Thorne and her fish. Personally I've always thought fish were a lot smarter than most people believe. I don't see anything fantastic in a fish being almost intelligent when it's as old and has been through as much as this one seems to have been."

JACK STARED at him, his expression slowly altering from contempt and defiance to hope and reserved friendliness.

"You *talk* sense," he admitted. "If Oscar'll turn me loose we can go out and look around. I don't think Frieda will come back, but we can look."

"Why don't you think she'll come back?" Frank asked casually.

"Well, she's mad at me because she got caught in my net," Jack said. "And she didn't like me, really. It was just that I had a boat and could take her outside the bay. It wasn't even the same as ordinary tourists. They look at you like you're a character, but human, just the same as they are. She looked at me like, well, like Mrs. Grant, the rich lady, does. Like I belong to some other race. Dogs maybe."

"You mean when you took her out this last time?" Frank asked.

"I only took her out the once," Jack said. "That was two weeks ago. And that's when I'm talking about. She wanted to hire me to take her out. I wouldn't take any money. I was going out fishing anyway, and she came along."

"Alone?" Frank asked.

"Yes," Jack said.

"What'd she do when you kissed her," Frank said, smiling. "Slap you?"

"I didn't try nothing like that," Jack Sprout said. But his face turned a deep red. Realizing this he broke down. "All right," he said sullenly. "So I tried to get fresh with her. What would you have done, when she climbed out of the water, with it dripping from her, without any clothes on?"

"The same thing, probably," Frank said, laughing. "And if she spurned me I'd probably dream about her and think about her, and wind up wanting her more than anything else on earth. That's the way those things usually work out."

"But that's what caused the trouble," Jack said, his mood changing. "She wasn't mad at me for trying to get fresh with her. She might have let me. She was teasing me, running around the boat. But when I caught her—" He clamped his mouth shut.

"She didn't have anything on when this happened?" Frank said. "She was asking for trouble."

"That's just it," Jack said, shifting uncomfortably. "She wanted me to get fresh with her. It was when I wouldn't that she—" A peculiar expression crossed his face. "She wasn't human. I felt it. I left her there on the foredeck and headed back toward shore. That's what made her mad."

Oscar cleared his throat. "I'm sending you back to clink for now, Jack," he said. "The doc and I will talk, and if he thinks it's OK I'll release you later in the day."

Frank opened his mouth, then closed it. He saw that Oscar had something on his mind.

Oscar had pressed a button on his desk. A policeman came in. Oscar nodded toward Jack, and watched while the fisherman was led away. When the door closed he turned to

talk to the city doctor.

"I think that's the slip I've been waiting for," he said. "Jack's boat doesn't have a foredeck. Just an open hold where the fish can be poured in from the nets."

"Then you think he left her lying in the hold?" Frank said.

"In about two feet of stagnant water," Oscar said, "strong with the smell of dead fish. These fishermen seldom clean that out thoroughly. I think he was talking about the last time she went out with him. I think that's when he killed her because she insisted in flaunting her body before him and fought him off. He killed her, left her in the hold for at least a day while he cooked up a plan to get clear. When he got the idea of leaving her swim suit and robe on the beach he took it off her and dropped her at sea."

"What would be the chances of her body being washed up on shore?" Frank asked.

"Practically nil if an experienced fisherman dropped her off shore," Oscar said. "He'd know the currents and drop her where she'd go on out to sea. That's why Dr. Nelson suggested interesting you in the case. The only way we have of solving the thing short of finding the body is to break Jack down. And you're the only one who can do that." The phone had rung while he was talking. He scooped it up now. "Yeah?" he grunted. He listened a moment, his eyes going wide. "They've found the body," he said to Frank. "Over on Crab Point."

"**W**ELL PICK up Dr. Nelson,"

Oscar said. "He acts as coroner whenever there's any coronering to be done." He grinned widely at his own wisecrack.

After a ten minute wait at Dr. Nelson's office they got started, taking a

dirt road that bounced over scabrock as it skirted the bay toward Crab Point, a neck of uninviting rocky beach jutting out from the mainland to extend better than halfway across the inner harbor, and acting as a breakwater.

Oscar was in high spirits. "This is going to wrap up this case in a hurry," he said to Dr. Nelson after explaining about finding the body.

"I wouldn't be too sure," Frank said.

"What do you mean?" Oscar said. "What more can we ask? The body, the man who did it, and just about enough evidence to prove he did it—with your expert testimony, of course."

"You saw Jack Sprout?" Dr. Nelson asked.

"I saw him, doctor," Frank said.

"Was he as interesting a case as I thought he would be?" Dr. Nelson asked.

Interesting, yes," Frank said.

The police car left the road and bounced violently over the rough beach toward the shore where another police car and a small group of people were gathered. It bounced to a stop beside the other car.

Oscar opened the door. They got out and went the remaining few yards to the shore. There was a brown blanket spread out over something, just a few feet away from the hungrily reaching waves that washed up. It was a nice day. The air was barely moving. The waves came along toward shore in rolling waves that came up without breaking into whitecaps, thinned out as they went onto the beach, and lingered before slowly going back.

"Foul play all right, chief," one of the police said importantly. He went to the blanket and lifted it enough to reveal the head.

"God!" Oscar muttered, staring at

the crushed skull. "He must have struck her a dozen times to batter in her brains like that."

Dr. Nelson bent down and peered at the ugly wound. Bits of brain matter were mixed with hair and bone, all washed clean of blood by long immersion in water.

"How long would you say she's been dead?" Oscar asked.

"Can't say until we take her down to the morgue and I give the body a thorough examination," Dr. Nelson said. He looked up at Frank. "Want to take a look?"

Frank shook his head, glancing up with the others to look at the ambulance that was coming.

"I'll do my looking when we have her down at the morgue," he said. "How was she found? Here on the beach where she is now?"

"I found her," a narrow shouldered man in overalls spoke up eagerly. "She was in shallow water when I saw her. I took off my shoes and waded in, and dragged her out to where she is now."

"Good work, Harry," Oscar said to the man. "I'll make sure the big city papers get your name in the story as the one who found the body." He started to turn away. "Oh yes," he said, turning back. "You'll have to be at the inquest to tell about it, too. That'll be tomorrow morning at ten o'clock. Be in my office about a quarter to."

"I'd like to make a suggestion, doctor," Frank said to Dr. Nelson. "Have the ambulance men lift her onto the stretcher instead of rolling her."

The ambulance driver and his helper were already at the body. Dr. Nelson relayed the order to them. Oscar got into the car. The two doctors followed.

They rode along in silence for several minutes.

"I suppose you'll be going back to New York now that the case is

cleared up?" Oscar asked suddenly. "You don't have to stay, really. I'm confident Jack will confess when we confront him with the body. I intend to do that just as soon as Dr. Nelson's through with his autopsy."

"You saw the face," Frank said, ignoring Oscar's question. "Are you sure it was the same girl, Frieda Thorne?"

"Certainly," Oscar said. He looked at Frank curiously.

Frank nodded, a frown on his face.

"What's eating you, doctor?" Oscar said, half humorously. "From your expression I'm beginning to think you doubt it was murder."

"Oh, it was murder all right," Frank said. "Or at least, I should say, she was deliberately killed. But Jack Sprout didn't do it. I'll stake my reputation on that."

"Then who did?" Oscar demanded.

"The fish," Frank said quietly. He shook his head and held up his hand as both Oscar and Dr. Nelson started to protest. "It had to be the fish. That's the only thing that makes sense, and even that doesn't make sense unless—"

"Unless what?" Oscar demanded.

"I can't answer that just yet," Frank said. "I'm going to ask you to postpone the inquest while I send for a certain young lady to help me get at the root of this mess. I'll call her long distance. She should be able to get here by morning. Her name is Helen Cooper."

"YOU'RE Oscar Freeman?"

Oscar jerked around. It was five thirty in the morning. He had volunteered to meet Helen Cooper so that Dr. Richards wouldn't have to get up at such an ungodly hour. He had watched until he thought everyone was off the train without seeing anyone answering to her description, then turned away.

"Yes," he said, sizing her up hasti-

ly. She was a little taller than he with her high heels on. A striking brunette with sparkling blue eyes, a vivacious smile. He decided he liked her. "You must be Helen Cooper," he said, smiling.

"This is going to be exciting," Helen said. "Will I get to ride in a prowler car? You like this town, don't you. That's why you live here." She closed her eyes for a moment, then popped them open again and smiled. "It's a nice town. It has a nice spirit to it. But there's something else here. I don't mean Frank. He's here. I can feel him. But there's something else here too. Let's go to where Frank is. I'll feel safer. It's dangerous, I think. At least it's probing, though I don't believe it's sensed me yet."

She smiled again. More than a little bewildered Oscar took her arm and escorted her out to the car.

"I think I understand Dr. Richards' saying for me to bring her to him even if I had to use force," he silently decided. "She's the kind that might decide to go window shopping at six in the morning and forget what she came here for."

He was uncomfortably conscious of her presence in the seat of the car beside him as the police chauffeur drove toward the hotel.

She leaned forward suddenly and touched the driver on the shoulder.

"Please hurry," she said anxiously. She sat back as the car speeded up. Turning to Oscar she said, "I feel like I want to go swimming, but don't let me." She smiled again. "It's the *drawing*, and I'm so susceptible to it." She slid over next to him and reached for his hand. "Hold my han—" She looked down at the metal hook her fingers had touched. Her eyes widened. "Oh, I'm so sorry," she said.

It was the first time anyone had ever said that in a way that made him feel good about it.

"My other hand is O.K.," he said, grinning. He reached over with it and took one of her hands. When the car stopped in front of the hotel he regretted that the trip was over so soon.

"Keep holding my hand until we get to Frank," Helen whispered. "And don't leave me for one instant."

She stayed close to him as they entered the hotel. He felt a strong urge to put his arm around her waist.

"I'd feel much better if you did," she said.

Unconsciously he put his arm around her. Then, "Huh?" he exclaimed. "Are you a mind reader?"

A smile flashed over her worried face and was gone. Suddenly she relaxed. "Frank's awake now, thank God!" she breathed almost inaudibly. "Take me straight up to his room. And don't go away. Somehow you have a good effect on me."

In the elevator she stood stiffly erect, a fixed, intent expression on her face. When they left the elevator she turned in the right direction, hurrying so fast Oscar had to almost trot to keep up with her. She seemed to know where she was going, and stopped at the right door without looking at the number. Instead of knocking she tried the knob, rattling it impatiently when it wouldn't open the door.

The key turned in the lock. The door opened. Frank stood framed in the doorway, trousers on, but barefooted and without a shirt on.

He was smiling in welcome. As his eyes came to rest on Helen his smile vanished, to be replaced by a look of concern.

"It's affected you already!" he said, almost angrily. He took her shoulder in his hand and pulled her into the room. Oscar followed, his amazement and bewilderment increasing.

BY TEN o'clock Oscar's bewilderment had increased to the point

of numbness. And the numbness was altering to something very close to fear.

The ocean which had always been something friendly to him with its mischievous whitecaps on windy days, its lazy swells on calm days, its violently pounding waves that matched the mood of the weather on stormy days, had subtly taken on a third dimension of sinister depth. He began to sense a nameless horror lurking under its friendly surface. The same kind of formless horror that he could dimly remember imagining lurked in a darkened room when he was two or three years old.

He first caught the feeling when Helen broke away from Dr. Richards and began running as fast as her high heels could carry her toward the waterfront. He had become infected with it from the urgency in the doctor's eyes, the way he had said, "For God's sake, after her! We've got to keep her from getting to the water!"

They had caught up with her. And she had smiled at them calmly when they firmly led her back to the car. But she had changed during those few moments. When she smiled at him after that her eyes looked through him instead of at him or into him. She no longer said anything. She gave the impression her thoughts were a million miles away.

At the police station when the doctor said to put her in a room where she could be watched through peepholes, with the doors locked and heavy guard at every possible avenue of escape from the room, she hadn't seemed to even hear.

He and the doctor had watched her through peepholes. She had wandered about the room, then sat down on a hard bench, her hands folded across her lap, her eyes staring into space, a quiet little smile on her lips as though she were listening to someone. She had stayed that way. She

was still in the same position when he and the doctor had come back after breakfast...

"Ten o'clock," Frank said. "This is what I want done. I want Jack Sprout brought out and placed in that room with her. He's to be told that he's being turned loose today, and all that's necessary is for him to wait in there until you can see him. Then he can go. He must believe that when he goes in there."

"But I can't do that!" Oscar said. "I'm not—"

"Do what I say," Frank said. "You'll see my reasons."

Ten minutes later they watched Jack enter the room. Through the peepholes they saw him stop just inside the door, startled, as his eyes fell on Helen. She seemed not to notice him at first.

He sat down across the room from her, studying her. Finally she looked over at him, her lips parting in a dreamy smile.

"Hello," they heard Jack say. "What are you here for?"

"Oh, I'm just waiting," Helen answered vaguely.

"I'm waiting too," Jack said. "I wish Oscar would hurry up and see me so I can get out of here. I'm anxious to take my boat out."

"You have a boat?" Helen said, looking at him with new interest. "Could I go out riding with you?"

"Uh uh," Jack said firmly. "That's why I'm in here. I took a girl out in my boat. A week later she disappeared, and they suspected me of murdering her."

Helen stood up and walked across the room. She kept her eyes locked with Jack's, dropping to her knees in front of him, resting her hands on his knees.

"Please take me out in your boat," she said. "I—I like you." She leaned toward him, a dreamy seductive smile parting her lips.

Jack glanced about the room guiltily, then slipped his arms under hers and around her waist, drawing her close. She lifted her face. He crushed his lips against hers.

Then abruptly he was on his feet running toward the door. He pounded on it with his knuckles, shouting to be let out.

"Let him out and bring him into my office," Oscar said to the guards.

He and Frank hurried into the office. They were lounging in chairs as though they had been there for hours when Jack Sprout was admitted.

"That girl in that room!" he blurted as soon as he entered. "She's just like Frieda!"

"What do you mean?" Oscar asked.

"What I was telling you," Jack said excitedly. "Different."

"You mean—*alien*?" Frank suggested.

"Yes! That's it!" Jack said. "That's just what I mean."

"Now do you believe the story he told you?" Frank asked.

"Hell!" Oscar spat. "I believed it two hours ago."

"We're going fishing with you in your boat, Jack," Frank said. He turned to Oscar who had paled visibly. "We'll want high powered rifles with needle nose bullets."

CRAB POINT was a long finger of mainland reaching toward the boat on the port side. Already the ocean swell was taking a firm grip on the boat's motion, giving it a fore and aft rhythm that under ordinary circumstances would have been soothing. Far ahead a blue mist obscured the horizon. To the stern the town lay along the curving shore in picturesque panorama.

Oscar Freeman, the police chief, glanced sternward at Jack Sprout who was standing at the tiller, running his fingers over the spokes of the wheel

lovingly. Oscar's eyes softened. He knew how much Jack loved his boat, the only thing he owned.

His gaze shifted around to the three policemen standing up in the fish hold, rifles ready, nervous tenseness visible in their every line.

He frowned at the narrow door to the cabin. Behind that locked door Helen was being too quiet. It made Oscar uneasy to have her so quiet.

He went over and bent down to look through one of the windows. Helen was sitting on a bunk, her back straight, her face relaxed, her eyes staring into space.

He went back to where the two doctors were standing.

"She's just sitting there," he growled.

Crab Point slipped to the sternward. There was no sound except the slapping of the salt water against the hull and the muted powerful sound of the motor under the deck where they stood.

"What made you believe Jack's story?" Dr. Nelson asked suddenly. "I saw so much evidence of Freudian symbolism cropping out that I was sure it was a fabrication of the mind."

"And you were right," Frank said quietly. "Most of it was a fabrication of the mind. I saw that evidence myself. There were one or two things that couldn't possibly be that, however."

He took out a cigarette and lit it, cupping his lighter in his hands.

"Did it ever occur to you," he went on, "that ocean or lake water contains enough oxygen so that if a human being could breathe it like air is breathed it would be possible to live underwater? A fish out of water can live a long time by getting its oxygen from the air, provided its gills are kept moist. In the same way people could breathe water *if they could get it into their lungs*. It's a well known fact that death by drowning

is a sort of strangulation. Very little water gets into the lungs. The reason for that is that the phlegm in the throat and the bronchial tract gells and prevents the water from entering. Panic adds to the complications.

"If that panic could be avoided and a person were to breathe through the mouth, it might be possible to switch from air breathing to water breathing!" Frank smiled at the amazed expressions on Oscar's and Dr. Nelson's faces. "Under hypnotism it would be possible not only to prevent the panic but to convince the subject that such a thing was natural. Especially if the hypnotist were a *water breather by nature*."

"I'd never heard of it being done before, but when Jack Sprout described how Frieda climbed aboard and bent over, forcing the water from her lungs so she could breathe air again, I knew that he was describing something that actually happened. It was a thing utterly beyond his ability to imagine either consciously or subconsciously."

"I can see that now," Dr. Nelson said. "But even if I'd seen it at once I would have dismissed it. The implications are even more incredible than it would have been to admit the possibility of him being able to imagine it."

"There was something else though," Frank said. "It was his sudden feeling that something was radically different about Frieda when he took her in his arms and kissed her. So different that even though he was in the throws of physical passion and he held an undressed and very beautiful girl in his arms he suddenly thrust her away and headed back for shore to escape. Why? He hadn't felt that way the instant before! The symbolism would be obvious, if it were a symbolism. Then it could be said that in reality it had been the other way around. She had repulsed him, and

after he killed her it twisted to him repulsing her. But there was a more natural explanation. If she were in a hypnotic trance at the time it would explain his reaction.

"Then there were her clothes on the beach at Crab Point. They could have been planted there, but it was more consistent with the overall picture if she had gone out there deliberately and swam out to sea. *To join the being that lurked out there, calling to her.*" He turned bleak eyes to the calm surface of the water gliding past. Oscar and Dr. Nelson followed his gaze, sensing the horror that lurked under that calm screen. "A being, perhaps out of the unexplored depths of the mid-Atlantic. A being who has come close to shore and is using its powers to call its prey to it, even from dry land, just as a certain kind of snake can hypnotize its prey, and who lurks out there even now, calling to Helen as it called to Frieda." He sighed deeply. "You see, Helen is a very gifted psychic and has been under hypnosis so many times she's extremely sensitive to it. It was Frieda Thorne's sensitiveness that made her the first victim."

"And the last, I hope," Oscar said grimly.

THE BOAT pitched suddenly to the starboard. The surface of the water boiled darkly. A shot punctuated the atmosphere.

"Stop that!" Frank said. "I told you not to fire until you could actually see something."

"Sorry, sir," the policeman who had fired said sheepishly.

Frank surveyed the unnaturally white faces of the men, the grim lines of his face relaxing slightly. "We've got to be cool," he said. "This thing, whatever it is, is big enough to rock a twenty foot boat."

"I thought Jack said it was a giant flounder," Oscar said.

Frank shook his head. "I think it can look different to different people. In other words, the shape you will see will be what your mind paints. Not its actual shape."

He went to the cabin and stooped to look in a window. Helen had taken off her clothes. She was standing in the center of the cabin, her head cocked to one side as though she were listening to some distant voice. As he watched she went to the door.

"Be ready with your rifles," he warned.

He went to the door and unlocked it.

"Shut off your motor and drift," he said to Jack Sprout. Then to Oscar, "It may take the two of us to hold her if she tries to jump overboard."

The cabin door opened slowly. There was a universal gasp as Helen emerged slowly to stand on the deck.

Apparently unconscious of her nakedness she turned her head this way and that, sniffing the air delicately, a dreamy smile on her lips. Her eyes fell on Oscar.

"Oh, hello, darling," she said casually. "Isn't it nice weather? I think I'll go in for a swim. You don't mind do you?"

Her expression was one of utter innocence.

Oscar darted a questioning glance at Frank, who nodded.

"Of course I don't mind, Helen," Oscar said.

"You're a dear," Helen said. She stepped up to him and put her arms over his shoulders, her breasts lightly touching his shirt front.

He stood frozen, an expression of torture on his face.

Helen began to breathe deeply. Her eyes widened, glowing with inner excitement.

"Don't let her go, Oscar!" Frank said sharply.

The ship was rocking noticeably now from the motion of something un-

der the surface. An electrical tension seemed to be building up in the atmosphere around the ship.

Helen started to step back from Oscar. Quickly he circled her waist with his arms.

"Let me go, Oscar," Helen said cajolingly. "I just want to take a short dip." Her voice sharpened angrily. "Let me go!"

The boat was rocking more violently now. It tipped suddenly to one side. Oscar fell, dragging Helen with him.

There was a flash of white as she broke free of his embrace and darted to the edge of the deck. She poised there an instant while Frank and Dr. Nelson leaped toward her. Then she was a white arc cutting into the water.

"Cover us!" Oscar shouted. He had gotten to his feet. He dived in where Helen had disappeared.

Helen had surfaced. Oscar's head appeared a few feet from hers. He was trying to get to her, his clothing hampering him.

The three police were methodically spacing their rifle fire around them.

Suddenly the motor roared into life. The boat picked up speed, making a wide circle around the two figures in the water. A pile of neatly folded net at the stern was being pulled into the water to form a circling arc of floats bobbing in the water. The boat completed its circle. Jack Sprout was in his element now, doing his work with the skill and instinct inherited from generations of fishermen.

Something appeared just under the surface. The rifle shots switched to it, but it had dropped out of sight. Jack had stopped the motor after reversing it and halting the boat. Now he began hauling in the net.

Oscar had reached Helen and was struggling with her to keep her from diving under. The net settled against them, holding them.

The scaled back of a giant fish broke the surface just outside the net. Instantly the three rifles spat. Again, and again. Suddenly the finned back dissolved into nothing.

At the same instant Helen grew slack in Oscar's arms. Jack drew in the net until Frank and Dr. Nelson could reach down and take Helen's hands and draw her up.

JACK SPROUT went into the cabin and brought out a long poled gaff. He reached down into the widening pool of dark red and hooked it into the bulbous mass floating there. The hook took hold for a moment, then pulled through.

Helen, a robe drawn around her, stood within the encirclement of Oscar Freeman's arm, a dazed expression on her face. The others were watching the thing with a mixture of repugnance and fascination on their faces.

"It won't hook," Jack said. "Some kind of pulpy stuff that falls apart. What's that red stuff in the water? Blood?"

Something white appeared under the surface. With a grunt Jack hooked it, drawing it to the surface.

For a brief instant an almost human face was there, deeply sunken eyes of coal black glaring at them. There were black holes in the oily smooth skull shape, bullet punctures.

Then the thing parted as the gaff went through it as though it were rotten flesh. It paused just below the red surface of the water. A large bubble of air broke the surface. The whole shapeless mass slowly dropped out of sight until there was nothing but the red stain, slowly floating away.

With a hurt cry Helen turned to huddle against Oscar. He pulled her close against him, comforting her.

"What a horrible creature," Dr. Nelson whispered hoarsely.

"It's probably best that it wouldn't hold together so we could take it to shore," Frank said. "I only hope there are no more of its kind. Vampires of the deep."

"That thing looked almost human. Its face, anyway," Jack Sprout said.

"Perhaps it was, Jack," Frank said. "Yes, I rather think that once, long ago, it *was*—human."

Helen crept closer into Oscar's arms, sobbing softly.

THE END

EAT ANTIBIOTICS!

By
CONRAD KYLE

THE MIRACLE drugs—aureomycin, streptomycin, terramycin and others—have been found to have another function besides their effectiveness in combatting disease. The peculiar faculty they've been found to possess is the rather astounding one that when fed into the body along with food, they enable the body to extract anywhere from a tenth to a third more nourishment from the food.

It has been suspected for some time that the body by no means extracts all of the latent energy found in food stuffs. In fact, its efficiency in this matter is often comparatively low. But a test of the "wonder drugs" discloses that by stimulation with them, the body can be made a more efficient mechanism.

Preliminary experiments with chickens and other farm animals show that they gain ten to fifteen per cent in weight

when antibiotic supplementary drugs are fed in along with the conventional foods. Pigs, when fed with ordinary farm dirt, known of course to contain a small quantity of terramycin, also increased tremendously in weight without the addition of ordinary food increases.

Experiments are being conducted with children. They are being fed antibiotics, and their weight increases carefully noted along with the weight increases of test control subjects. It is too early to predict sensational results, but it is a certainty that some advantageous change will be noted. When you realize what a large part of the world is still undernourished, the value of this work can be realized. Perhaps the future will see all of us taking the wonder drugs as a matter of course along with our eggs and bacon!

A STITCH IN TIME . . .

By
MILTON MATTHEW

IN SPIKE of the wonderful advances in medicine, in drugs and surgery in particular, certain techniques of the science are as unchanged as ever. True there have been minor refinements, but surgery is still a matter of making a cut and closing it. Though metal clamps are used, in many instances the primary closing tool of the surgeon is the needle and thread—and will be the same for a long time to come.

Furthermore, though science has provided all sorts of synthetic fibers and metallic wires, "catgut" (the intestine of the sheep) is still the major sewing substance. The reason for this is clear: catgut alone, of all the sewing materials used, has the unique property of eventually absorbing itself into the tissues. Thus a wound sewn with catgut need not have the stitches removed, as would one sewn with materials like nylon, cotton thread and stainless steel wire.

None of the above-mentioned materials can be absorbed by the tissues. Hence these substances must remain in the wound or be removed after the wound has healed. The major problem in closing a wound still remains a sepsis. Thread holes

and threads act as conductors for bacteria which can enter the healing wound through these tiny orifices and cause infection. This is prevented to a certain extent by using a needle with a clamp on the end so that the hole is no bigger than the thread. Also the thread material is impregnated with plastics and waxes to make it as non-porous as possible.

Metallic materials like tantalum can be accepted by the body tissues, but most other metals used in surgery, particularly stainless steel, cannot. Consequently this immensely strong wire, while ideal for certain types of work, cannot be employed indiscriminately.

Surgery is waiting for the development—will it ever come?—of some technique of closing wounds which does not rely on the surgeon's skill with a needle, nor the use of threads at all. Perhaps some ingenious force-beam will be invented in the future which will clamp the flesh without penetrating it, until it heals. Most surgeons would give their right arms for that device right now. However, until something like it appears, the old needle and thread apparatus will have to be used. "A stitch in time..."

MARTIAN CLIMATE

By A. MORRIS

WHILE IT'S interesting to compare the climatic conditions on Mars with those of Earth, and even to give them similar names, it doesn't pay to push the analogy too far, for the details are considerably different. The thin air of Mars, for example, makes the daylight sky an incredibly deep blue, an azure comparable to that of the ocean. This is because diffusion and dispersion are so much less than on Earth whose dust-laden atmosphere and dense air give a much lighter color.

Nor are the "Polar ice caps" exactly what that phrase implies. They are not huge blocks of ice covering the poles. They are not vast ice-fields like those of our own Arctic and Antarctic though you might think so from the name. Instead, they are thin layers of ice crystals similar to the hoar-frost which forms on windows and roofs during a cold spell. The layers are very thin—possibly of the order of only a centimeter. They are visible, of course, because ice is such an excellent reflector. Nor do they melt and flow with the coming of the Martian summer. Instead they evaporate into water vapor directly, without becoming liquid.

Though the greatest part of Mars' water is locked in her atmosphere in the form of vapor, the quantity is actually so little that the humidity is less than one-tenth of one per cent. The Martian atmosphere is dry! Menzel, the well-known astronomer, states that the temperature at the Martian poles may attain seventy or eighty degrees Fahrenheit in full sunlight, after the Polar ice cap has vaporized into the atmosphere.

Most astronomers are in pretty much uniform agreement that plant-life of the lichen variety exists on the red planet. The seasonal changes in color observed there from our planet indicates that that must almost certainly be the case. No other reasonable hypothesis suggests itself to account for the color variations.

As for animal life—that's still the sixty-four dollar question. The older school of astronomers seems to discourage the idea entirely. But observing the adaptability and tenacity of life-forms here on Earth suggests that Mars might have them. Life seems capable of sustaining itself almost anywhere, if it's given the slightest chance to adjust to its environment. Inimical though Mars may seem, we suspect it has some little "critters" running around.



The CLUB HOUSE

- Where science fiction fan clubs get together.

PROPHECY is always an interesting subject. So when I received a card from a fan a few weeks ago along that line I read it with great interest. This fan prophesied that I would sell two stories to the movies and have three pocket novels appear in 1951. That's a very nice prophecy. Along with that he predicted there would be forty sf prozines on the stands in '51, with eight of them monthly. And that one now on the stands would fold.

There are a lot of implications in that kind of prophecy. Forty magazines of sf would mean there will be no major war in '51, because if war came they couldn't get the paper. And as I write this CLUB HOUSE the day after Christmas, it is perhaps the only straw pointing away from war.

It's funny, the way a person psychologically *wants* to believe a prophecy—any prophecy, and clings to those that have been true.

Hannes Bok, the artist, makes a hobby of astrology. Last spring when I was in New York for a few weeks he made out my chart for the coming month, with definite predictions for definite days of the month of May. Two of them were quite remarkable. One was a prediction that on a certain day I would receive bad news from a distance—a standard prophecy—and on that day I received a letter from a sister saying that my mother was ill. It had been sent to a previous address, and if it had been sent to the right address it would have reached me the day before Hannes predicted! The second one was that I would receive money, probably from a business associate. That stood practically no chance of coming true. In the first place the predicted day was a Wednesday and I get checks almost always on either Friday or Monday. To make it more impossible, I was in bed with a fever (due, it was found out several months later, to a deficiency in vitamin C that made me sensitive to chemical vapors), and had no intention of getting out of bed. At noon an editor dropped in to see me, having heard I was ill, and left me a fat check for a story!

The prophecies of astrology are based on a theory that the positions of the planets, the sun, and the moon, affect what we do, and that, more specifically, *when* we are born determines *how* those

positions of the planets affect us.

That may or may not be true. Certainly we are in no position yet to know. We are slowly advancing to a position where we can perceive the almost infinite complexity of forces impinging on our brains, however, and perhaps some of those forces do affect how we think—and therefore what we do and how we react.

Right now, for instance, coursing through your body are weak but definite electrical currents generated by every radio broadcasting station in the world. Get a good enough radio and use yourself as an antenna and see for yourself!

An experiment was performed recently in which part of the covering of the brain was removed, exposing the cortical layer of the brain of a living person. Then a fine wire carrying a very weak current was touched to successive points on that cortical layer. It produced strong memories in the mind of the subject of things that had taken place at various times. In other words, any force that can stimulate a cell in the cortical layer can bring some thought into consciousness that would otherwise remain dormant, not called up by the current train of associations going on in the mind! Thus, if a cosmic particle—and there are several of them shooting through your brain every minute!—if a cosmic particle could by some freak activate a brain-cell and cause an otherwise dormant memory to come vividly to mind, starting a train of thoughts and emotions of its own, it would be entirely possible for one cosmic particle to change the course of your whole day—or life!

And how many other types of radiation are there that we know little about, in their possible actions on the physical—chemical structure of the brain? What effect do radiations with a wave-length equal to the diameter of the cell have on that cell? What kinds of radiations do the complex organic molecules of cells emit? What kinds affect them? Maybe thousands of years of science will find those answers, but it doesn't take much thought to realize that perhaps a large part of our thinking—and therefore our doing—is dictated by those subtle forces passing through us all the time, some from the stars and the moon, others from the people around us, and even from the trees, the mountains, the sea, and the walls of

the house we live in.

Have you ever noticed how much less prickly and more comfortable heat radiated from iron is than that radiated from a German-silver heating element? Have you ever *felt* that one locality or one house is more comfortable and congenial than another? Have you ever been some place where you had to fight the urge to get out as fast as you could, for no reason? Have things "popped into your mind out of the blue" for no reason? How often do you suppose that happens without your noticing that the thought didn't logically arise from what went before it?

Probably more than you would care to think. The mind has a way of rationalizing and possessing, and doesn't like to think it might be to some real extent the victim of forces not brought through the ordinary senses...

I have been elected an honorary member of the National Fantasy Fan Federation. This is the largest single group of fans in existence. Rick Sneary is its president. If you want information about joining write to Roy Lavender, Box 132, Delaware, Ohio. If you belong to this group you get all kinds of advantages. Discounts on sf books, letter pals, fan indices, stationery, a distributing service for your literary efforts, and others too numerous to mention. I want to thank those of the welcoming committee who have written me letters welcoming me into N.F.F.F. here, and to say to all N-triple-F's that I feel highly honored. This honorary membership is in recognition of the good the CLUB HOUSE has done for fandom. I sincerely hope that it can continue to bring fans all over the world together as it has in the past. Believe me, nothing gives me more pleasure than meeting or receiving letters from you people in fandom who would never have contacted other fans at all except for my word pictures in this department that told how much fun you can have as actifans.

Did you know that there are forty-eight active local fan clubs? I just received a list of them as a new member of N.F.F.F.. Also a simple little mimeographed thing shaped like a fanzine that involved the joint work and effort of quite a few people over quite a few years. It's called a Checklist of U.S. Prozines, corrected and brought up to date by Art Rapp. All it is is a complete list of all sf prozines published up to May 1950. I'm beginning to think you can't possibly get more for a dollar in fandom than by joining the N.F.F.F.. And I understand there is no limit to the number of members they can have as there is in the Fantasy Amateur Press Association and the Spectator Amateur Press Society.

S.A.P.S.: The Spectator Amateur Press Society; a group of thirty-five fans publishing fanzines that come out quarterly in a single collected mailing to members

only. If you want to join you can get on the waiting list by writing to Richard Eney, Rt. 1, Box 239-B, Alexandria, Va. The mailing sent in for review is the thirteenth mailing, which means that SAPS is in its fifth year of existence. There are eighteen items in the mailing, varying from full fledged fanzines to single page items, some mimeoed and some dittoed. They make a pile of reading material an inch thick including artwork, stories, poems, and purely club business. There are six people on the waiting list to become members already. It's a shame that all fans can't get these mailings if they want them, but this type of fanclub is designed to provide a tight circle and eliminate the long extra hours of mimeographing copies for the general public.

MAX BRAND: 50c; Darrell C. Richardson, 6 Silver Ave., South Fort Mitchell, Covington, Ky.. A sixty-two page one-shot fanzine telling all about one of the most prolific writers of all times, better known as Faust. He wrote under at least twenty different names, and many an issue of many a magazine contained nothing else but his stories. If you're a collector you need this zine.

Dr. Richardson is himself one of the greatest collectors of science fiction in the country. His collection of sf prozines is perhaps the only complete one in existence.

FANTASY-TIMES: twice a month; 10c; James V. Taurasi, 137-03 Thirty-second Ave., Flushing, L.I., N.Y.. Events have been happening with such rapidity that this top newzine has had to bring out a couple of extras lately. The folding of A. Merritt's Fantasy Magazine, the moving of the Z-D fiction group to New York, the purchasing of the magazine *Imagination* by Bill Hamling, former managing editor of the Z-D fiction group, and other things, made the extras necessary, and needless to say all the regular subscribers of F-T had the news while it was happening, and knew about it before other fans. That's the advantage of being a F-T reader.

AMOEB: no price listed; Norman E. Hartman, 146 E. 12th, Eugene, Ore.. A nice little six page printed zine. This zine is a byproduct of Eusifano, the fanzine put out by the Eugene fan club. I met most of that club while at the Norwescon in September. Sometime I think they should hold one of the national fan conventions in Eugene. Minutes of one of the club meetings are in this issue of Amoeba. The meeting opened at 8:10 and closed at 8:30! Short and sweet. And, quoting from the report, "It was moved and seconded that discussion of the question, 'What would you do in case an A-bomb went off near you?' be referred to the vice-president." As Fran Laney would say, "Priceless...absolutely priceless..."

BEM: 10c; Dennis Strong, 942 Scribner N.W., Grand Rapids, Michigan. One story, "Martian Interlude" by Bob Brisey, and three articles. One poem and two regular features. All very good.

INTERSTELLAR IRREGULAR: 5c; Tony Lubowe, 760 Grand Concourse, New York 51, N.Y.. Two reglength mimeographed pages in this first issue. Tony and his friends who put this out have just graduated from junior high school, and are working on the idea of starting a science fiction club. Besides Tony there is Bill Streifer, Henry Ziegler, and Louis Uffer. This Bronx sf club has put out an interesting fanzine. It includes a couple of book reviews and three short-short stories.

STEF CARD: 20/50c; Walter A. Coslet, Box 6, Helena, Montana. A straight to the point newscard dittoed on one side of a penny postcard. And you'd be surprised how much news can be condensed into such a small space!

FANVARIETY: no. 3; 10c; W. Max Keasler, 420 S. 11th St., Poplar Bluff, Mo.. Patterned somewhat after the prozine of the same name. It seems that there was a contest to name this fanzine. J. T. Oliver, being the only contestant, won a year's free subscription for naming it Fanvariety.

Most interesting article is "Tips from the Pros" on how to write fiction. Most of the tips listed there are strictly n.g.. Especially the one that you should study the current policies of the magazine you wish to write for and stick to them. That's the way not to sell. Most editors are dissatisfied with their current policy, more or less, and are looking for something different to try out for improvement. Also, few editors want to imitate another editor's policy, so if the editor you write for turns your story down you're sunk. Best way in my opinion is to write a darn good story in the general current style that you can get from a composite of all the zines, and generally if it is a good story any editor will want it.

GRAVEYARD: 15c; Richard Dittmar, 509 W. 183rd St., New York 33, N.Y.. Fourteen pages. There's part two of a four part serial with the title "Out of Nowhere" by Dittmar; another, "Apostle's Creed", by Charles Paoli; an article on flying saucers by Christopher Christopher. It's written on the assumption that the discs are operated by extra-terrestrials. Very interesting...

A CHECKLIST OF AUSTRALIAN FANTASY: The Futurian Press, 160 Beach St., Coogee, Sydney, Australia. This issue is already sold out, but other titles will appear in the near future, the next being, "Blinded They Fly", a fan-

tasy by Vol Molesworth at a dollar a copy. A note accompanying this fanzine says that an American agent will soon be appointed. In writing enquiries you might ask who the new agent is.

IMPOSSIBLE: 10c; a production of the Nameless Ones of Seattle; Burnett R. Teskey, 3433 15th N.E., Seattle 5, Wash.. I wouldn't say that this zine is impossible... Nor would I say that the editor croaked, though the title of the editorial says so. It's a new kind of fanzine, devoted to publishing stories that are totally impossible. Most interesting item is the prozine reviews.

SHANGRI-LA: official organ of the Los Angeles Science-Fantasy Society. Helene Mears, Subscription manager, 1305 W. Ingraham St., Los Angeles 17, California, which is also the address of the Lasfas club room. For a dollar you can become an associate member of this club which is one of the largest local clubs in the country. This is issue number 23, with a cover by Bill Rotsler. In spite of Helene's editorial saying it's the best issue ever put out, it is far from that. However, it's a good interesting issue, with stories and articles and a large letter department.

QUANDRY: 10c; 101 Wagner St., Savannah, Ga.. Highlight is an article by Bob Tucker on "How to Kill a Fanzine". Then there's "Typewriter of Tantalus", a nice short story by Redd Boggs. Harry Warner gives with a somewhat satirical article which relegates fandom to the class, "Some of the People all of the Time..." in an article by that title. That's just a beginning in this fanzine. Thirteen articles and stories in 26 pages.

NEWS LETTER: 10c; Bob Tucker, Box 260, Bloomington, Ill.. The Christmas issue has pictures in it taken at the Norweeson, one of which is of Mack Reynolds, Howard Browne, and myself. Howard says he was asleep when that picture was taken—which accounts for the peaceful look of contentment on his face, no doubt.

One of the news items in Bob Tucker's Science Fiction News Letter is a notice that writers John and Dorothy deCourcy have moved from Troutdale, Oregon to Taos, New Mexico, the home of Mack Reynolds. There is no connection between that and the announcement that Mack Reynolds is now raising goats except that they are in the same announcement.

And there's no connection between those two facts and something that just popped into my head. My agent just sold A.P. syndicate rights to my pocket novel "Time Trap", so it should appear in various newspapers, probably as a serial. I would appreciate getting copies of this when it appears, if any of you care to send me one.

FAN-VET: for men in the armed forces, published by James V. Taurasi and Ray Van Houten, 127 Spring St., Paterson 3, N.J.. Membership in the Fantasy Veterans Association is open to all veterans of the U.S. armed forces with at least 90 days service, or present members of the armed forces who have served at least ninety days. Both men and women in this category are eligible. This fanzine is for you men in Korea or any place else out of touch with things, and will no doubt be a welcome addition to your mail out there. More power to Jimmy and Ray in this project! And you can help support it by subscribing to *Fantasy-Times*, reviewed elsewhere in this department.

NEW ENTERPRISE REVIEW: single copy on receipt of postal card, twelve issues (one year) \$1.00; Volume 1, Number two—December 1950: New Enterprise Publications, Post Office Box 83, Gravesend Station, Brooklyn, New York. This publication is made for the benefit of any and all fanzine readers, whether they subscribe to New Enterprise Publications or not. An interest in the publications is enough. It is produced on a non-profit level, prints 500 copies per issue, and contains general reviews and excerpts from or about all New Enterprise Publications. This issue of the review has a mixture of 81 hectographed, printed, and mimeographed pages, showing the progress the concern has made in fan publishing from 1949 to date. There are four full page illustrations by Henry Chabot, Joe Gross (all rights by Chabot), and Bill Benulis. Reports on two fan conventions, and one other are to be found. Also included are two pages of poetry, 10 pages of fiction, 5 pages of news, two pages of advertisements. A list of pro pen-names, and three pages of reviews are to be found among

other things. Bill Knapfelde, Ron Lyons, Lou Sherman, Rich Elsberry, Morton Paley, Bill Benulis, Joe Gross, Henry Chabot, Joe Schaumburger, Helena (Schwimmer) Schaumburger, Jack Schwab, myself and others all have material in it. Twenty-eight pages are reprints from our best publishing jobs of the past, while the other three contain reviews of present publications. An almost complete history of New Enterprise is to be found. *Atlantis, Lost, Found, Lost* by Howard Blind is one of the best fan written stories I've ever seen, and that's saying something since my files give access to over 100 fanzines. If someone wishes to advertise, I can think of no better way to do it reasonably and surely than to send 'em into Ron Friedman, the editor (all checks and money orders payable to him). Rates are \$1.50 a page, 75c a half, 40c a quarter, a quarter an eighth, and 15c all less. 500 circulation is GUARANTEED! Well—what more could you ask to receive for a postal card, or two and a twelfth cents a copy. Rates are soon to go up (August 1951), so take my advice and send in a quarter for a year's subscription...TO-DAY!

Ron Friedman did his own writeup for the *New Enterprise Review*. A far more detailed review than I could have attempted. And that seems to be the bottom of the pile for this time. As I write this it's Thursday before New Year's, 1951. I wonder what I'll be doing this time next year...

When I think of all the tension existing in the world today, New Year's 1952 seems an awfully long way away. Almost an impossibly long way away. But I know it will eventually arrive, and I sincerely hope that when it does we are all looking back on the tensions existing now as things of the past.

—ROG PHILLIPS

PLANET OF NO RETURN

By LAWRENCE
CHANDLER

(Concluded From Page 49)

long sleek lines of the seven ships rise steeply toward the blue and fade from sight. Never was she to see her world again, never to know the luxury and comforts of life as the ruler of half a planet.

Slowly she turned away from the disappearing link to the only life she

had ever known. Her eyes sought out and found the figure of Valar still motionless by the tree.

In that moment she knew that fate had made for her the only decision that was right and good, and with singing heart and arms outspread she ran toward the man she loved.

THE END

The Reader's FORUM



LETTER OF THE MONTH

...OR ELSE?

Dear Editor:

The actual low down truth is that I like lurid gals on the cover better than this here now hammer about to hit a thumb. I guess I am depraved; but that is the dope. If men instinctively liked to look at hammers hitting thumbs better than at gals, we wouldn't be here today to look at *anything*. I am suspicious of anybody who says he doesn't like gals such as Burgy and the others make. He either is talking through his hat or there is something wrong with him.

And I like the stories wild and woolly too. Whether the sentences are polished up is of no importance. This science-fiction spread fast because the writers were not first of all trying to show off their skill in sentence structure and that sort of thing. One magazine this month has a story treated impressionistically with fade-outs and so on. After fighting my way about two-thirds through the thing I gave it up.

Most everything gets that way—polished up to where it lacks interest. Take the modern kitchen, for instance. It has been made into such a show place that people are escaping from it into the back yard and cooking on a jigger out there where they can muss it up and enjoy themselves. Living rooms have gone the same way. People are escaping into the basement where they can spill ashes, and put their feet up on whatever is handy.

The more polished up a house is, the more frantic the occupants are to climb into the car and get away from it.

Henry Maloy
Box 553
Eureka, Kansas

Surely you'll agree that a good story well-written is more enjoyable than a good story badly written. However, even good writing can seldom make a bad story good—although there are certainly exceptions to that rule.... There's certainly a great deal to be said for the sentiments expressed in your last two paragraphs.

—Ed.

Dear Mr. Browne,

I realize that your magazine was started with the intention of making it a pulp magazine and planned to appeal to the class of reading public that is attracted by a flashy cover, worse inside illustrations, questionable ads, and sexually stimulating passages in the stories.

But now I think it is time you realized that science-fiction has at last become universally popular and your regular readers are no longer of the type mentioned. I should think you would be delighted with this shift and grasp the opportunity to grow with science-fiction instead of actually retarding it by making it seem cheap and vulgar.

It is therefore obvious that you will both elevate your magazine and vastly please and increase your readers by completely reversing your policy. In short, clean it up!

I will sign this letter, but since I do not want my name connected with AMAZING STORIES as it now stands, please withhold it, should you print my letter.

Name Withheld

It's all a matter of taste, madam, as the woman said when she kissed the cow. Your description of this magazine is, to its general readership and publishers, completely ridiculous. And, if we know our readers, they'll tell you the same thing—although not so politely! As a witness for the defense, we call Mrs. Gaylord Welch to the stand. She does not ask that her name be withheld....

—Ed.

Dear Sir:

All the other readers are giving opinions on your wonderful magazines, and it's high time I did the same.

I have been reading FA and AS for six years and enjoy them very much. The stories and covers that is. But the Reader's Forum is one thing I don't like of late. It seems almost everyone is throwing off your beautiful art work (the covers). Every letter I read doing so I get so mad I could chew nails. The work your artists

do is not called art these days, it seems. No, these old cronies and old maids would rather look at a picture full of lines, a nose and a mouth and call it art. The least I can say of these people is that they are narrow-minded and have forgotten the beautiful things in life. The women who kick of your awe-inspiring covers don't have the shape your artists dream up and are afraid their husbands will see and compare. And the men who kick are just plain crazy or for want of something to rave about. I have never seen a man who doesn't like to look at female figures whether in pictures or otherwise, and I bet no one else has either.

I say put anything you like on the covers, and the more nudes the better. And don't think people will quit buying them if you put females on the covers. They will buy them and love it although they are too silly to admit it. And if they don't want to buy them because of the covers no one is making them. I wouldn't even buy FA and AS if it weren't for the covers and the women in the stories.

Not much more to say except the stories are wonderful and very enjoyable and to please have Rog Phillips write a novel. He's tops.

Keep your magazines as they are and keep your old readers.

Mrs. Gaylord Welch
Richwood, N. Va.

Amen!

Ed.

THE BLUSHES ARE OUR OWN!

Greetings:

AS and I met last September. I was on vacation in New England. I happened to see it on a mag stack in a drugstore. The cover looked interesting, so I bought it. Wow! I saw mention of FA on the back cover. The statement, "I want a yearly subscription to each" sort of explains what happened.

Compliments: Are they needed? Well, you've got good writers and good artists. By the way, HB, have you ever tried writing s-f? I'm no critic, but any fool can see that you are wasting ability not writing more than the "Observatory". I mean it!

Criticisms: There is nothing "dirty" about sex, but when artists put an overdose into s-f illos, it shows a lack of imagination. I know, because I'm somewhat of a pencil pusher myself.

Comments: It was Bob Heinlein who introduced me to s-f. He really rates with me, and anyone who says contrary is going to have to talk with a lisp! Hamilton's "Star Kings" is being published as a pocket type book under the title of "Beyond the Moon". I recommend it for anyone who likes a fast moving fantasy. In recent issues there has been a lot of talk of the s-f movies "Rocketship XM" and

"Destination Moon". I have seen and enjoyed both. The opinions expressed in AS and FA are my own sentiments to the letter. I have found the combination you were looking for in H.G. Wells' "Things to Come". I saw it about two years ago. It wasn't publicized and that was all I ever heard about it. It was, in simplest terms, a terrific plot, technically perfect to my knowledge, and beautifully filmed. Up until a short while ago, the National Broadcasting Company had a radio show called "Dimension X". For some reason, the management stupidly (offense intended) cut the show off the air. In a moment of reckless ambition I thought you might know why.

Suggestions: Cut out some of those degrading ads in your mag. Catalogues and mags hidden behind newsstands in the slums cover that pretty efficiently. I know the situation is awful, but can't you do something about your printing material? You read the stories through and it half falls apart.

Regrets: That you're losing Bill Hamling in the switch to N.Y. I hope I have this right and that you are staying with AS and FA.

David Shear
409 Battery Lane
Bethesda 14, Md.

We've written a few science-fantasy pieces in our day, none of which actually won the Pulitzer prize: "Carbon-copy Killer," "The Strange Mission of Arthur Pendran," "Warrior of the Dawn," "Forgotten Worlds," "The Man From Yesterday," "Return of Tharn," and others... We understand the program "Dimension X" is now back on the air.... —Ed.

SHOCK TREATMENT

Dear Sir:

I have been a constant reader of AMAZING for many years. I do not write much, but I sure enjoy the stories. However, there is one thing I would like to hear some comment about—it is this: Look in the Bible, Zechariah V: Verses 1 and 2. I am sure it will give you a jolt like it did me. I would like to hear your comment.

Jack Morgan
137-39 96 Place
Ozone Park, N.Y.

Zechariah V: verses 1. and 2. read as follows: "Then I turned and lifted up mine eyes and looked, and behold a flying roll. And he said unto me, what seest thou? And I answered, I see a flying roll; the length thereof is twenty cubits, and the breadth thereof ten cubits." ...The word "roll" refers to a scroll bearing words, and not to the appearance of a flying saucer. However, Jack, if you're in the market for a shock, try Ezekiel I: verses 4-28. —Ed.

WHY NOT THE SHAVER MYSTERY?

Dear Editor,

As one of your long term readers, I have finally roused myself to again write some of my opinions regarding "our" mag. I have read AS since the late twenties, I believe. I wrote you once about the time you had the large sized mag, I think regarding EXODUS.

Now, regarding the cover pictures. Shouldn't an s-f mag show that type of picture on the cover? And in browsing about a newsstand, if your glance passes over a lurid sexy cover, wouldn't you naturally think it a mag of that type depicted on the cover? I liked the covers best when you had s-f pictures on both front and back of the mag.

Secondly, regarding reprints of good stories in current issues—well, I am for it 100%, if we could get stories like Exodus, The Professor Jameson series, etc. During the past decade I feel that the Shaver mystery stories and "So Shall Ye Reap" were the best.

Now, I was away for a while and unable to get several mags, and this was the time when you stopped the Shaver stories of the underworld. Altho I hunted the used magazine stores, I never found an issue that explained *why* these had been stopped. Are you free to answer this question—Was it because of an official request? One reader told me that he thought people were in a mild panic regarding the Deros, and that you had been requested to discontinue that type of story. Personally, I am at a loss to explain why you stopped. Each time I pick up a new mag, I check the list of contents to see if there are any stories by Rog Phillips or Richard Shaver, and if there are, I feel satisfied that I will enjoy the mag more than ever.

If any of your readers have been successful in getting any photographs in the caverns below the Sergeant Ranch, near Brackettville, Texas, I'd sure like to get some copies. We tried twice in both caves, but all came out blank.

All for now. Perhaps in another ten years I'll get sufficiently annoyed about something to write again. However, keep up the good work.

Jon E. H. Barnes
c/o G. B. Williams,
P. O. Box 1041
Reno, Nevada

When the Shaver stories proved no longer popular we discontinued them. It's as simple as that! —Ed.

JACKSONVILLE (FLA.) FANS
PLEASE NOTE

Dear Ed,

Can't someone tell me if there is an s-f fan club here in Jacksonville? I would

appreciate such information very much.

About the magazine: First I think you should give us some sketches on the more well known writers. They are always in your pages, but I don't know anything about them.

About sexy covers: There seems to be an awful lot of letters coming in condemning them but this is just recently. Up to a few months ago it was just about balanced. I am in favor of them every other month—that should please both parties.

The stories were good this issue as usual, but couldn't they be a little longer?

Peter Sherrill
2655 Dellwood Ave.
Jacksonville, Fla.

Using only one kind of cover would be as bad as running only one kind of story!... Space prevents us from running longer yarns and still presenting a variety of them. —Ed.

IN DEFENSE OF FANZINES

Dear Mr. Browne:

Your editorial in the current AMAZING which I purchased today interested me. I do not know for certain whether I am the reader who gave the suggestion, for what you said was only a garbled version of what I told Bill Hamling; which is why I'm not sure. That two fan should have such an inspiration at the same, or nearly the same, instant is rather a large coincidence. I suggested running an amateur contest, but I have outlined that before and to repeat it now would be just a waste of time, yours and mine.

I can imagine your feelings on looking into current fan mags if you've not been reading even a few lately (or ever). I was rather disgusted with my first fan mag. And with most of the others I've seen. That's why I began publishing one. Or one of the reasons.

I chuckled delightedly at your comments about fan covers bearing nudes and their contents being against nudes on proxine covers. Oh how true. Must you, however, judge by the majority? Bradbury came out of the fanzines, yes, but he was only one of many who tried to write, and fell by the wayside as he went on to success. Similarly, perhaps, there are but five or ten of the scores of fan writers now trying their hands at writing who have the "spark" to succeed. That is not to say you should waste your time reading every single fanzine which pops up amidst a whirlpool of publishing.

But would it do any harm to have someone like Rog Phillips—who has to read most of them anyway—keep an eye out for promising young writers. To have someone on the lookout for writers who look as if they can blossom into good professionals might turn up some new

talent at a time when that talent seems to be very necessary.

Most fanzines are news fanzines or just generalzines (which is another name for a fanzine in which the editor and his pals can express their views on everything from fandom to politics) and offhand I can just think of about four or five fanzines which carry stories in any large amount and quality. These are NEKROMANTIKON, SHIVERS, PEON, BIZARRE, and my own, FAN-FARE—and possibly SCIENCE, FANTASY, & SCIENCE FICTION. I have my opinions about these magazines and the authors in them, but I am far from professional in judgment, and therefore I doubt my own choice.

I'm going to send you a copy of the first anniversary issue of FAN-FARE, which contains five of the best stories I think I've received all through my first year of fan publishing, with a couple of exceptions due to space of course. I've lined up a very few professional editors and authors, such as Mary Gnaedinger and Mack Reynolds and Jerome Bixby, to write letters of comment on the stories and give their advice to the various authors. I would like you to do likewise if you can in the heat of moving to New York. If you can't, at least read it with the knowledge that it is the best that I can produce from my contacts with amateurs, and it is produced in all seriousness. I am a high school student, sixteen years of age, and about to graduate in January. I do this for a hobby. I like it. I hope you do too.

W. Paul Ganley

There was no intention on our part, in writing that column on fanzines, to overlook authors, editors and artists who got their start in such publications. But they, we submit, would have become authors, editors and artists even if there were no such things as fanzines. Any man or woman who honestly wants to be an author, say, will be one—provided he wants to be one and will never rest, never quit trying, never stop learning, until he IS one. The same holds true for practically any profession or trade. —Ed.

PORTIA FACES PLUTO

Dear Editor:

I am glad to see the enlargement of the Reader's Forum. But by a quick glance at the letters, one might be led to believe that the average reader of AMAZING is a suffering housewife who must take time out from the care and feeding of her fourteen children to tell you how wonderful your magazine is only she doesn't like the nasty nudes and she must stop writing now because little Boopsy is crying.

Be this the case, I say go to it: kill the science fillers and put in household

hints; run serials that ask the question: "Can a woman over thirty-five be happy while her husband is caught in a parallel time track?" or "Portia faces Pluto".

I have nothing against housewives—they are a very noble institution, and they have every right to be indignant about what they feel is objectionable cheesecake. But who the devil cares whether their offspring ask coy questions about "undressed ladies" or not? When AMAZING becomes tailored for the children of busy housewives, let me know.

Perhaps still-life would be uplifting to science-fiction, but publishers are still more interested in selling magazines. (Beastly inconsiderate of them, isn't it?) Of course, cheesecake is not art—fine art—as Newton W. Hooton claimed it was, in supposed sincerity. (I still think Newton W. Hooton is a pseudonym for Chester W. Lester)

So I'm not casting my vote for cheesecake and I'm not casting my vote against it. You will probably agree with me that the best cover policy is no policy at all. If you have a good looking gal for a cover, print it. Or a good stellar scene. Or even another cover with a giant hand. In other words, be lenient, huh?

Earl Newlin, Jr.
103 Peck Avenue
San Antonio 10, Texas

We're telling you right now, Earl, the women aren't going to take kindly to your remarks.... —Ed.

FROM A FANZINE EDITOR

Dear Rog Phillips,

I just got through reading the editorial of the latest AS—give or take a day or so. Frankly it appalled me more than somewhat. In the first place, H.B. admits he only looked through about twenty fanzines. That is scarcely a fair selection. Almost that many are published every month. Frankly, again, I was a trifle surprised at Browne's smugness. Perhaps it was not intended. Thusly. I don't know. Especially the jibes at printing. I have seen dittoing and mimeographing which were superior to the printing in AS. It was neat, clear, well-designed as to format, and on good quality paper. Can you say the same for AS?

Also, Mr. Browne mentioned the reporting. I agree with him there. However, if you would release something like your engagement and subsequent marriage to Miss Wolfe, news reporting might be a trifle more accurate. You guys are so darn close-mouthed that speculation is almost necessary.

Finally the covers: Again I agree with Mr. Browne. I think a great many fanzine covers are atrocious. Some are lewd, and some are merely artless, or if any elements of art are used, they are often the wrong

ones. However, there are several I might mention that often have gorgeous covers. Among them, ORB. I do not consider nudes lewd. That is, some nudes. As a rule, they are far more honest than the scantily dressed figures posed sexily on the covers of Bergey's work and sometimes yours. Also, a fan publication is different from a pro publication, in that it is sold exclusively to other fans and not ordinarily viewed by the public. Therefore, the distaste accorded nudes by a great many people is not often encountered. Also, they are notoriously unmoved by what is said about them by the general public. A prozine cannot operate that way.

Finally the stories: Mr. Browne scored a point, but very weakly. For instance, the NEKROMANTIKON. Some of the stories in this mag could easily grace your magazine, or WEIRD TALES and actually improve on present fare. Also, good stories are occasionally carried by SLANT, GORGON, STANTFANTASY before its demise, and many others.

To prove my point, RAP is using some cute, very cynical little opi by Clive Jackson in OW occasionally. Also some by 4sJ. All of these are not pro, but two definitely were, (both Jackson's, I might add).

P.S. Pass this on to Mr. Browne if you care to.

Bob Johnson
Editor, ORB
P.O. Box 941
Greeley, Colo.

It seemed to us that a sampling of twenty fanzines, chosen utterly at random, should be ample for the purpose mentioned in "The Observatory". Of course there are exceptions; we mentioned a couple at the time. We are just as sure that we missed seeing others worthy of praise. But, if we may use a metaphor to sum up our impression: the ore doesn't assay high enough to continue digging.

—Ed.

WHAT ABOUT THE ROCKET SOCIETY?

Dear Mr. Browne,

I first started reading your magazine in 1948. I got hold of one and never let it out of my sight until I had finished it. The first story I read was one called "Earth Slaves to Space" by Richard Shaver. And that brings me to the question that has been bothering me for quite some time. What has happened to Mr. Shaver?

I have just finished reading your January issue of AMAZING. I found, as usual, that the mag was just as superb as ever, as far as stories go. All of the stories were very good; however, I would like to congratulate Robert Arnette on his "Empire of Evil". A story packed with thrills and suspense from beginning

to end. Mr. Arnette wields a mean pen.

I was disappointed when I found out that I had missed the Norwescon s-f convention. I heard it was a huge success.

By the way, if you could forward to me some information about this Chicago Rocket Society I would be much obliged to you. I was wondering if there is any such club in this vicinity. I have been greatly interested in the C.R.S. ever since I first heard of its existence.

Getting back to your magazine, I would like to say that you should give a medal to the lad who illustrates your covers. Like the covers preceding this one, well it's super. So, with these words of praise (and you certainly deserve them) I shall bid you goodbye. Keep up the good work.

Dave Sunderman
4214 S.E. Holgate
Portland 6, Oregon

MAN BITES TRASH!

Dear Mr. Browne:

My first letter to any magazine was to AMAZING and so shall be my second, but in a slightly different vein of thought.

I must confess I wrote it in such a manner as to be controversial and therefore to be printed. Now, after reading the Reader's Forum in the February issue, I find that being juvenile is not necessary.

In the February issue several readers said they were ashamed of the covers and one young lady even tore them off. In my modest opinion *all*, and I emphasize *all*, pulp magazines are trash. The trash of the literary world, and should be placed in the same category with picture love stories, crime comic books, and true experience type magazines. But don't get me wrong. I happen to enjoy certain forms of "trash". I should have classed illustrated "posed by professional models" detective stories in the scum of literature classification. Again I don't want to be misunderstood, because people in all walks of life read various forms of what I classify as trash.

Reading is a vice with the general public, a means of relaxation, not anything to be ashamed of. It makes me sore to think of some stinking prim saying, "Naughty, naughty," because we read AMAZING with its lurid cover and pulp form and then goes and sticks her face in some detective rag where a young girl is raped every other page.

I started reading AMAZING when I was ten and even then I wasn't such a coward that I wouldn't let my mother see the covers. Most of the people who wrote letters saying they were embarrassed by the covers seemed to be too old for such nonsense.

Generally covers express the type of story found in the magazine. It would seem to be the fact of the matter that these bashful people buy your magazine with its "foul, vulgar, obscene" covers expecting

pornographic literature in the science-fiction field and are just plain disappointed.

Other readers write in asking for reprints of old stories. It is my sincerest wish that you do not comply with these requests for you are one of the few magazines printing only fresh material. I enjoy seeing new names below the titles because, unless they are pen names, the stories are always fresh even though they may not be as well written as they could be.

There is one thing I miss in your magazine and it is those fine old space operas. They might have been corny and trite but they were entertaining which should be the prime requisite for any story.

I would very much enjoy receiving letters from a few fans on the same subjects I have discussed here so I could correlate their opinions and determine the general opinion of your readers.

Gene Freeman
1740 N. Santa Fe
Compton 2, Calif.

More and more we see how fallacious any generalization is. To call all pulp fiction "trash" is as meaningless as to call all smooth-paper fiction "good". —Ed.

HOW "NORMAL" CAN YOU GET?

Dear Sir:

Your editorials read like you are capable of understanding business common sense. So—

When you buy a drink, do you want 80% proof? Do you smoke hillbilly "long green" that kills insects at long range? Do you eat food black with pepper? Some fanatics do these things. Would it be good business trying to sell such things to the general public? Do the big cigarette, liquor, etc. companies sell such things?

Why then do you think it good business to put the most insanely unbelievable fantastic things you can find in your magazine to sell to the public? The ranker you make it, the smaller the group you can possibly sell to.

You editors and writers of so-called science-fiction (it really has become science bunk) have become freaks. Just as workers in a foundry or smelter become abnormal because great heat is normal to them. You move toward the fantastic because insanity is normal to your group.

Get a research bureau outside s-f to sample average reader interest in your stories. You will find that fantastic rot and distance in time and/or space cut down interest.

The vast market is among people interested in, and having some knowledge of the possibilities of applied science. Especially interesting to the public are rigorously accurate stories about possibilities that may affect our own lives.

Let us get down to a specific example.

The plot "hero saves planet and race light years and multi centuries away" is worn out. But revamp it this way: Hero starts here and now to force into use one of the many possible improvements to make machines actually our servants. Opposition from factory owners whose machines would become obsolete. Opposition from crooked union leaders because it would reduce the number paying dues to them. Opposition from men whose skills would become obsolete. Demonstration that civilization has fought these things all the way up. Benefits to all shown from hero's efforts including saving country from attack by dictator country that was pulling ahead.

In short a hundred people are interested in what advancing science means to them—to one interested, fantasy is ridiculous. Choose your market—a hundred practical people able to buy or one crackpot.

Clinton J. Reed
Newkirk, Okla.

Like most sweeping, all-inclusive statements, yours is as full of holes as Swiss on rye. We know our readers because our readers tell us about themselves; we know what they want because they tell us what they want—and we wouldn't dream of giving them what we think they should read. Honestly, we don't know what anybody should read! Certainly there are far too many people around who seek to tell everybody what to wear, what movies to see, what books to read, what ticket to vote. Our mission is not to save people from the folly of their ways; if we have one at all, it's to save them from people who want to save them!... It's quite possible an excellent story could be written based on the plot you suggest—but only if it contained in addition those elements that you have failed to mention: action, suspense, human conflict and emotions. —Ed.

MR. IN-BETWEEN

Dear Mr. Browne,

I read Peter Sherrill's comment on keeping AMAZING STORIES so the young reader can understand them, and I couldn't resist the urge to put in my two cents' worth. I don't believe that your mag should be toned down so a five year old can understand it, and on the other hand I don't approve of making it an "adults only" type of book, or you will bore a lot of faithful but silent teen-age fans. I can say this because I'm a "teen-ager" myself (19 to be exact) and I've been a reader of AMAZING and other s-f mags since I've been 15.

Your AMAZING STORIES quarterly was very good on the whole. I'm not going to say this story or that story is good or bad, but I will say your mag is the best s-f on the newsstands.

I'm deeply interested in the future and

the only way I can peep into it is by reading your mag. If anyone has a time machine hidden away somewhere, I wish they would let me know about it, because I will gladly take it on its first trip. (I'm not kidding!)"

I'm a service man now stationed in the states, but I soon expect to go overseas and when I do, I'm going to subscribe to **AMAZING STORIES** so I'll have a peep into the future while I'm ducking some of the old-fashioned bullets. I like your mag and I don't care if you don't have trimmed edges or a back cover picture.

PFC Leslie A. Mahoney
AF 19339236
Hq & Hq Sqd SMAMA
McClellan Air Force Base
California

Thank you, Les—and we hope nobody ever trims your edges, too! —Ed.

RIGHT ON THE LINE!

Dear Ed,

Your February cover is awful. All these people who complain about lurid covers are just worried about their friends' and relatives' opinions. I know this all sounds boring to you, but I firmly don't believe this letter will be published. It's too complaining for any such honor.

I have bought **AMAZING** for the last five years and I'm only 16. I and my other s-f friends are getting tired of hearing people say get rid of those half-naked girls on the covers. I don't see anything wrong with them and neither does my mother. She approves of me reading **AS** and **FA** for the scientific benefit I get out of it. She doesn't worry about the covers, after all you don't read the cover, you read the story. To close the letter, how about a few old time rocket ship battles?

Peter Sherrill
2655 Dellwood Avenue
Jacksonville, Fla.

PROJECT SCIENTASTIC

Dear Mr. Browne:

I have always enjoyed your letter department, mostly because of the news incorporated in the letters of the stf-fans. I wish to congratulate you on getting such a wonderful cover for the November issue of **AMAZING**—the best I've seen in a long time. My letter isn't only to tell you that I like your mag, though it might be of some importance in the way of spreading science-fantasy.

Today, many motion pictures are used to fill in the schedule of a TV station, the great majority of which are westerns and mysteries. Offhand, I can think of many old science-fantasy movies that may be shown on TV: the Arabian Nights series (Thief of Bagdad, Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves, etc.) H.G. Wells' "Things to Come", "War of the Worlds", "Man Who Could Work Miracles", and "The Invisible Man"; A. Conan Doyle's "Lost World", "Dr. Cyclops", "The Tiger Man" (movie version of Donovan's Brain) and Tarzan adventures.

If all the fans send in their letters to one particular network let's say WJZ-TV (American Broadcasting Company) New York, asking for a Science-Fantasy Movie Theatre and suggest some of the titles I've mentioned or any they can think of, we may have a pretty good chance of getting our wish. Let's make this year Project Scientastic. Fans! Bombard your radio and TV stations with letters asking for more science-fiction.

Joe Reitano
163 East Third Street
Mount Vernon, New York

TRIGGER . . . OF THE HEART

By
JUNE
LURIE

THE PRINCIPLE of resonance is used in many fields ranging from musical instruments to radar sets. It is familiar to anyone who has ever watched children in a playground. By gentle taps of the fingers, a person sitting in a swing may be set into violent motion, provided the taps are given at precisely the right time. Light taps of a hammer can knock down a huge structure if the taps are delivered in synchronization with the vibration frequency of the structure.

An ordinary watch makes use of resonance when the main spring kicks the balance wheel at properly timed intervals. The most natural clock of all is the human heart which ticks away unfailingly and unvaryingly—until sickness strikes. The bane of surgeons is the matter of keeping the heart beating strongly and confidently

when the patient lies anesthetized on the operating table. All sorts of drugs like nitroglycerin and digitalis have been used for this purpose. But recently an announcement was made to the effect that successful animal experimentation had disclosed that the heart could be stimulated electrically!

In some way as yet unknown to us, the heart, the blood-pump of the system, is fundamentally a machine driven by nervous electric impulses. Scientists have found that by thrusting a long needle, an electrode, into a vein not far removed from what is called the "trigger-node" of the heart, the beating of a failing heart may be stimulated once more into action. The electric pulses are synchronized with the natural frequency of the heart in question.

So far the technique has been used only on animals but is about ready for the human test. If it works successfully it will prove to be a terrific boon to surgeons. Their greatest fear is failure of "the pump" when the subject is undergoing the knife. It is interesting to note that this discovery is one more link in

the chain of machine and human function relations which have come to the attention of medical men recently. More and more, with the exception of that indefinable "soul", men are coming to realize that the body resembles an extremely complex and subtle machine!

★ ★ ★

TUNE ON THE GAS!

★

By

★

CHARLES RECOUR

ADVANCES in physics and in modern science in general can be described in terms of new instruments, for these are the things which push the unknown borderlines of knowledge farther back. Next to brains, a physicist must have instruments!

Great success is being attained with an instrument which we reported on briefly some time back, the "ultra-high frequency spectroscope," or "the micro-wave spectroscope." It is a device which permits technicians to tune in literally on molecules and atoms. It depends for its operation on a familiar principle, that of "resonance." Resonance or "tuning" is familiar to all of us, for it is used in radio and in many natural tools. A repeated impulse given to a body may set it into vibration if the body is resonant to that frequency, even though the size or magnitude of the impulse is small.

In the micro-wave spectroscope, a small quantity of a gas is mounted in what is

called a wave-guide, through which pass very high frequency waves of the radar type—or even waves bordering on the infra-red. These waves happen to have a wave-length which is comparable to exact multiples of the distance between atoms in the molecules of the particular gas under examination. The gas absorbs this radiation or resonates or is "in tune" with it. From the known size of the wave-length to which the gas is sympathetic, the scientist can deduce these intra-molecular distances.

This resonance in gases principle is, incidentally, the basis of the "ammonia clock" which has been recently invented and which promises to become our ultimate standard of time. Molecular spectroscopy may also become important as a gas analysis tool, saving a tremendous amount of energy in chemical laboratories. But most important, it can offer new knowledge about the nature of space between molecules and atoms—an exceedingly important matter in this day of hydrogen bombs!

TRITIUM IN NATURE

★

By

★

L. A. BURT

IF YOU remember the famous gas helium was first discovered in the Sun before its existence here on Earth was ever suspected. Physicists seem to be going through another period in which they are discovering things in nature which they formerly believed existed only as products of their laboratories. The most recent of these discoveries has to do with that most important isotope of hydrogen called "tritium".

Right now, tritium is as hot as a smoking pistol, for it is the building material of the hydrogen bomb. It is made by radioactive treatment of heavy water (deuterium) which gives to the hydrogen atom a mass of three, three times that of ordinary hydrogen. The half-life of radioactive tritium is extremely short, a matter of a little less than twelve years. Consequently, it is hardly to be expected that so short-lived a substance could be found in Nature.

However, extremely sensitive measuring instruments have determined that this

rare isotope does exist in natural heavy water, but only in one part in a million, million, million parts of heavy water! Such a tiny amount of tritium is of no value in making the hydrogen bomb. Not enough could be extracted to be useful. However the detection of the material indicates that it must somehow have been formed by cosmic ray bombardment. Nature's own atomic-nucleus smasher has been at work. Already scientists are using the measurement of natural tritium as a geological and archeological yardstick.

Apparently tritium is more common at the poles than at the equator. This provides a clue to the intensity of cosmic radiation and it also suggests that oceanic currents may be "traced" with this natural radioactive tracer which Nature has seen fit to deploy through the waters. However, as an atomic weapons aid, natural tritium is of no importance. Undoubtedly, though, in the atomic laboratories the boys are generating the stuff by the bucketful—tritium is the heart of the hydrogen bomb!

MATHEMATICAL MYSTERY

By
WILLIAM KARNEY

PURE MATHEMATICS requires the most abstract sort of thinking. For most of us who are simple engineers and chemists and physicists, the air in that region is so thin as to be unbreathable. The daffy doings of the pure mathematicians are strictly out of this world. Nevertheless, we can see that whatever nebulous thoughts the boys are thinking, they will eventually have some practical value. We've seen this happen many times in the history of science.

For a non-mathematician it is interesting to read of the paradoxes and complications that pure abstract thinking leads to. The familiar logical paradoxes which never seem satisfactorily resolved, such as the business of transfinite numbers, Zeno's paradox, the syllogism paradox and others, are amusing to us, but they have some definite value to the practical mathematician—the two words "practical" and "mathematician" can be joined so closely together.

We can at least see that mathematics has been divided into three camps of schools, each led by the ideas of prominent men and each containing a good deal of the truth. However none is final.

First, there is the "logistic" group of Bertrand Russell, the eminent English mathematician and philosopher (the words are synonymous—almost). This school believes that all mathematical reasoning can be reduced to a form of symbolic logic

wherein all relationships can be expressed in symbols. But it is by no means complete, and it still is not the ultimate answer. The practitioners, however, think it is.

The second group, the "axiomatists" led by the thoughts of the famous German mathematician, David Hilbert, believes that all mathematics can be reduced to a set of basic axioms. And from these axioms, a whole system can be erected. This system has a great deal of truth in it, too, but it also is not the final answer. In particular, it has a great deal of trouble proving that the axioms of simple arithmetic are true!

The third and final group, the "intuitionists" powered by the ideas of the Dutchman, L. E. J. Brouwer, believes that mathematics can be constructed from concepts which can be absolutely symbolized. It rejects all ideas which cannot. For example, the idea of a class of transfinite numbers is excluded because this concept cannot be symbolized completely.

Each of the three systems has flaws. But from each, tremendous advances have been made, and even though there seems to be no relationship at all between the three, actually they are all working toward the same end, the establishment of mathematical and logical thinking on a concrete foundation. Whether any or all will succeed in establishing this aim is not important really, for in the process of working in that direction, enormous advances are automatically made.

STARS AT NOON!

By
DALE LORD

WHY CAN'T we see the stars in the daytime? Most people would quickly give the correct answer—their light is masked by the more brilliant and intense light of the sky—that's all there is to it! The sun's light diffused through the sky far exceeds in brightness and intensity the feeble rays emitted by the remote stars. Thus we don't see the stars. If we rose to high enough altitudes where the air approaches a vacuum in thinness, then we'd have no trouble, of course, and we'd see them clearly against a blue-black background in spite of the shining sun.

While there is no particular reason that we'd like to see the stars in the daytime, it is interesting to ask if it is possible at all to photograph or detect them. After all, they still are throwing light toward us in the daytime. Can this be done?

The answer is yes. It is possible to detect starlight—even photograph stars in

full sunlight—in the daytime. The method and technique is simple and clear. Ordinary light is strongly polarized. If we use polarizing filters before our scope and camera lenses, we can get a star image. In addition, if we use infra-red or ultra-violet sensitive film in conjunction with the polarizing filters we can get surprisingly clear images of the stars despite strong daylight.

The people who are making a study of this work are not the astronomers but rather the film-makers who are concerned with developing extra-sensitive films. The sky-star test affords a natural and convenient test device against which to construct very fine-grained hyper-sensitive film. The work is proceeding very successfully indeed. Such film will have its effect on ordinary film even though there appears to be no direct connection—research is like that!

THE PSYCHOTIC TREES

By
LEE
OWEN

TREE SURGEONS are no novelty, but tree psychiatrists are something new under the sun! We don't think of plants as having intelligence, but psychological techniques are being used on them. Incredible as this may seem, it is part of a scientific theory now being tested.

According to certain European scientists, the production of trees can be speeded up by as much as fifteen years. The principle employed is simple, but startling when thought of in terms of "tree-mentality." The scientists band the trees with steel cables or they chop off half the roots. The tree "thinks" it is dying and as a result, makes a valiant effort to recover by throwing off quantities of seeds to insure that its progeny will have a chance to survive. Naturally, no mentality is involved here, but the procedure is such as to imply it. Consequently, it's a good joke to think of applying psychological shock treatments to the trees.

The tree actually is hurt, but the band is removed before the tree can die and invariably it recovers. For the reforestation of large areas, this speed-up process is invaluable. One of the most difficult jobs is re-seeding a forested area. The psycho treatment may be the answer!

ATOMIC IODINE

By JON BARRY

RADIOACTIVE products are rapidly coming out of the cloistered laboratories of the Atomic Energy Commission. At last they are being used by ordinary industry to great advantage. It is a familiar fact now—the use of radioactive tracers in the study of certain medical matters such as the distribution of medicines through the body. In a similar fashion, the wear and tear on automobile engines has been ascertained through applying radioactive elements to the piston rings.

The most recent accomplishment of the users of radioactive tracers is an ingenious one, applied by paper mills in Canada. A special batch of four tons of newsprint was made up by the mill. Then, in one of the filler components of the paper, one six-millionth of an ounce of radioactive iodine was inserted. The paper was put through the conventional processes and a complete and detailed survey made.

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AMATEUR RESEARCH

By
TOM LYNCH

WE'VE OFTEN stressed the benefits that have come from the amateur's interest in science. In the past, many great contributions have been made to science by amateurs (the first scientists were all amateurs) and the future will have its share, too. In our own times, one of the largest organized group of amateur scientists, experimenters and technicians, to be found is in the "ham" or amateur radio operators' associations. Here, hundreds of thousands of interested persons ranging from six to sixty have built radio transmission and receiving stations and are on the air at all hours, working within their allotted bands of frequencies and frequently designing new bits of important communications apparatus as well as serving as a vital network for emergencies in wartime.

There are many people who'd like to get into amateur radio, but who feel the licensing requirements are too severe. These people are about to be given a break, for the government is planning to encourage research among the amateurs by simplifying the tests.

Two new classifications have been proposed. One is the novice's which requires fewer than thirteen code words to be learned per minute, and the technical knowledge necessary is less, also. Thus, a beginner can get a start in radio in spite of its tremendous complexity today.

The second classification, and the really important one for the future, is the Technicians' group which will waive the code requirement entirely. This class will be limited to working the ultra-high end of the radio spectrum where real research is required. At long last, the government is taking cognizance of the fact that many technicians love to do research, but detest that code requirement. Since they've been forbidden on the air without the code license, they've usually given up the research. But now they'll be able to experiment to their heart's content.

With television, guided missiles, radar and other technical communications requiring knowledge of the high frequency spectrum, the knowledge gained from research is vitally important. Is it any wonder then that the government wants to encourage tens of thousands to devote their not-inconsiderable talents to working in the medium? The hams have shown their ability. Many familiar circuits and practices in radio and television and radar have stemmed from experimental work by amateurs who loved their art. With this evidence as a starting point, when the government finally proffers the "novices" and the "technicians" licenses we'll see a new burst of enthusiasm for amateur communications!

WHY REACH THE MOON?

By
WALT CRAIN

SOME CRITICS of modern science have laughed at what they think is the purposelessness of modern science, particularly that of rocketry. "Why," they ask, "reach for the Moon?" No one has better answered this foolish question than the English authority, Kenneth Gatland. His answer is a model of clarity. First, he points out the obvious aids to science such as observatories, new minerals possible, etc. But his basic point is this: "...through the interpretation of astronomical knowledge," he says, "it (the Moon flight) should greatly assist in raising the level of human consciousness...an enrichment of experience far exceeding anything Man has ever previously known must be the cardinal benefit of space flight."

There you have it. The broadening of Man's scientific horizon is the really important consequence of space flight. If the discovery of a continent can change history as did the discovery of America, what might the exploration of the planets do to Man's sense of being? The consequences are fantastically rich and illuminating. No human being on Earth who is capable of rational thought and who is aware, will ever be quite the same after the first manned rocket has been launched into space.

Among the interesting applications of the practical side of all of this, is a consideration of the consequences of establishing supply or satellite rockets which will endlessly encircle the Earth at given altitudes ranging from five hundred to tens of thousands of miles.

First, they would make excellent meteorological stations. As an astronomical observatory of immense possibilities, we can only guess what contributions they would make to "seeing". A radar beacon for Terran guidance would be another advantage. An interesting method of getting world television coverage would depend on three such stations set a hundred and twenty degrees apart, thus blanketing the entire Earth with a mere three stations!

For chemical, biological and physical research, such stations would be incredibly valuable. Imagine, for example, having all the high vacuum you could use by just thrusting your test device into an airlock!

One could go on for pages citing the advantages in practical terms, but the greatest advantage is still the subtle psychological one of offering Man a chance to leave the planet, to peer into the real universe.



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MOLECULAR DANCE

By OMAR BOOTH

WHAT HAPPENS when you remove the heat from a substance?

This question is as old as scientific research itself, and in light of the molecular theory of matter, the answer has been ascertained—at least that's what we thought. But some ingenious investigation has disclosed that our ideas are considerably less sound than we thought—as a matter of fact, you might say we don't know what we're talking about!

The conventional scientific picture of matter, in terms of the molecular theory, is that all substances are made up of tiny particles called molecules. These molecules are in random motion and the amount of random motion is a measure of the temperature of the substance. There is no question but that this view is true. What we call "heat" then, is really the random motion of molecules.

From that molecular viewpoint, it is clear that as we remove the heat from a substance, the motion of the molecules decreases, until, when all possible heat is removed (i.e. absolute zero is attained) the molecules are still. That, in essence, is the picture of matter generally accepted everywhere in physics.

But a fly has appeared in the ointment. It seems that scientific researchers have been studying the behavior of metals, notably steel, at low temperatures, within a short distance of so-called absolute zero. The behavior of the steel is peculiar. It becomes terrifically hard, much harder than one would expect, and the hardness is not that of brittleness, which would be the case if we thought the conventional molecular theory was the controlling agent.

Instead of the picture of molecules slowing down in their random motions to stillness, it appears that as the temperature goes down, the molecules of steel align themselves in rows which slide relative to one another in a sort of oscillating motion. You might think of this synchronous motion as that of a chorus line! The molecules move in rhythmic unison.

This new concept of the effect of decreasing temperature throws a monkey wrench into many a pet theory. The science of low temperatures is badly enough confused about such things as super-conductivity, etc., without the addition of this upsetting discovery.

The immediate importance of this knowledge is not apparent. But in the long run, it will be exceedingly valuable, for applied science (rocketry and jets and gas turbines) requires the development of alloys which can withstand temperature changes and still retain their strength. Heat-treatment of metallic materials can then be set on a strictly scientific basis as soon as more is known of the basic nature of the structure of metals.

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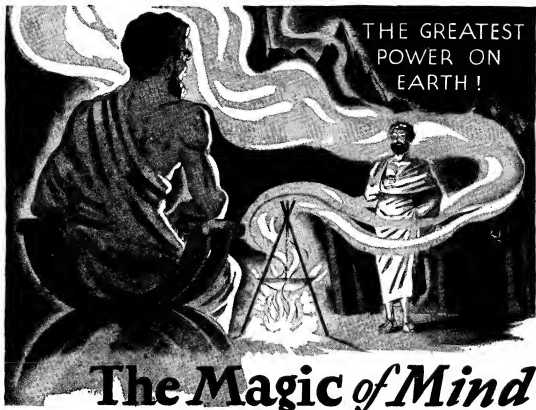
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Scribe: Y.W.C.
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San Jose, California

I am sincerely interested in knowing more about this unseen, vital power which can be used in acquiring the fullness and happiness of life. Please send me, without cost, the book, "THE MASTERY OF LIFE," which tells me how to receive this information.

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